

THE COLLECTED SHORT STORIES OF
WILLIAM FAULKNER

Volume III

Dr Martino and Other Stories

By William Faulkner

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Soldier's Pay

Sartoris

The Sound and the Fury

The Wild Palms

As I Lay Dying

Sanctuary

Light in August

Pylon

Absalom, Absalom !

The Unvanquished

The Hamlet

Go Down, Moses

Intruder in the Dust

Knight's Gambit

Requiem for a Nun

A Fable

The Town

Short Stories

These Thirteen

Uncle Willy & Other Stories

Dr Martino & Other Stories

Collected Stories

Faulkner's County

A Green Bough (Poems)

DR MARTINO
AND OTHER STORIES

Volume Three of the
Collected Short Stories
of
WILLIAM FAULKNER

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Barn Burning

THE STORE in which the Justice of the Peace's court was sitting smelled of cheese. The boy, crouched on his nail keg at the back of the crowded room, knew he smelled cheese, and more: from where he sat he could see the ranked shelves close-packed with the solid, squat, dynamic shapes of tin cans whose labels his stomach read, not from the lettering which meant nothing to his mind but from the scarlet devils and the silver curve of fish—this, the cheese which he knew he smelled and the hermetic meat which his intestines believed he smelled coming in intermittent gusts momentary and brief between the other constant one, the smell and sense just a little of fear because mostly of despair and grief, the old fierce pull of blood. He could not see the table where the Justice sat and before which his father and his father's enemy (*our enemy* he thought in that despair; *ourn! mine, and hisn both! He's my father!*) stood, but he could hear them, the two of them that is, because his father had said no word yet:

"But what proof have you, Mr. Harris?"

"I told you. The hog got into my corn. I caught it up and sent it back to him. He had no fence that would hold it. I told him so, warned him. The next time I put the hog in my pen. When he came to get it I gave him enough wire to patch up his pen. The next time I put the hog up and kept it. I rode down to his house and saw the wire I gave him still rolled on

to the spool in his yard. I told him he could have the hog when he paid me a dollar pound fee. That evening a nigger came with the dollar and got the hog. He was a strange nigger. He said, 'He say to tell you wood and hay kin burn.' I said, 'What?' 'That whut he say to tell you,' the nigger said. 'Wood and hay kin burn.' That night my barn burned. I got the stock out but I lost the barn."

"Where is the nigger? Have you got him?"

"He was a strange nigger, I tell you. I don't know what became of him."

"But that's not proof. Don't you see that's not proof?"

"Get that boy up here. He knows." For a moment the boy thought too that the man meant his older brother until Harris said, "Not him. The little one. The boy," and, crouching, small for his age, small and wiry like his father, in patched and faded jeans even too small for him, with straight, uncombed, brown hair and eyes gray and wild as storm scud, he saw the men between himself and the table part and become a lane of grim faces, at the end of which he saw the Justice, a shabby, collarless, graying man in spectacles, beckoning him. He felt no floor under his bare feet; he seemed to walk beneath the palpable weight of the grim turning faces. His father, stiff in his black Sunday coat, donned not for the trial but for the moving, did not even look at him. *He aims for me to lie*, he thought, again with that frantic grief and despair. *And I will have to do bit.*

"What's your name, boy?" the Justice said.

"Colonel Sartoris Snopes," the boy whispered.

"Hey?" the Justice said. "Talk louder. Colonel Sartoris? I reckon anybody named for Colonel Sartoris in this country can't help but tell the truth, can they?" The boy said nothing. *Enemy! Enemy!* he thought; for a moment he could not even see, could not see that the Justice's face was kindly nor discern that his voice was troubled when he spoke to the man

named Harris: "Do you want me to question this boy?" But he could hear, and during those subsequent long seconds while there was absolutely no sound in the crowded little room save that of quiet and intent breathing it was as if he had swung outward at the end of a grape vine, over a ravine, and at the top of the swing had been caught in a prolonged instant of mesmerized gravity, weightless in time.

"No!" Harris said violently, explosively. "Damnation! Send him out of here!" Now time, the fluid world, rushed beneath him again, the voices coming to him again through the smell of cheese and sealed meat, the fear and despair and the old grief of blood:

"This case is closed. I can't find against you, Snopes, but I can give you advice. Leave this country and don't come back to it."

His father spoke for the first time, his voice cold and harsh, level, without emphasis: "I aim to. I don't figure to stay in a country among people who . . ." he said something unprintable and vile, addressed to no one.

"That'll do," the Justice said. "Take your wagon and get out of this country before dark. Case dismissed."

His father turned, and he followed the stiff black coat, the wiry figure walking a little stiffly from where a Confederate provost's man's musket ball had taken him in the heel on a stolen horse thirty years ago, followed the two backs now, since his older brother had appeared from somewhere in the crowd, no taller than the father but thicker, chewing tobacco steadily, between the two lines of grim-faced men and out of the store and across the worn gallery and down the sagging steps and among the dogs and half-grown boys in the mild May dust, where as he passed a voice hissed:

"Barn burner!"

Again he could not see, whirling; there was a face in a red haze, moonlike, bigger than the full moon, the owner of it

half again his size, he leaping in the red haze toward the face, feeling no blow, feeling no shock when his head struck the earth, scrabbling up and leaping again, feeling no blow this time either and tasting no blood, scrabbling up to see the other boy in full flight and himself already leaping into pursuit as his father's hand jerked him back, the harsh, cold voice speaking above him: "Go get in the wagon."

It stood in a grove of locusts and mulberries across the road. His two hulking sisters in their Sunday dresses and his mother and her sister in calico and sunbonnets were already in it, sitting on and among the sorry residue of the dozen and more movings which even the boy could remember—the battered stove, the broken beds and chairs, the clock inlaid with mother-of-pearl, which would not run, stopped at some fourteen minutes past two o'clock of a dead and forgotten day and time, which had been his mother's dowry. She was crying, though when she saw him she drew her sleeve across her face and began to descend from the wagon. "Get back," the father said.

"He's hurt. I got to get some water and wash his . . ."

"Get back in the wagon," his father said. He got in too, over the tail-gate. His father mounted to the seat where the older brother already sat and struck the gaunt mules two savage blows with the peeled willow, but without heat. It was not even sadistic; it was exactly that same quality which in later years would cause his descendants to over-run the engine before putting a motor car into motion, striking and reining back in the same movement. The wagon went on, the store with its quiet crowd of grimly watching men dropped behind; a curve in the road hid it. *Forever* he thought. *Maybe he's done satisfied now, now that he has . . .* stopping himself, not to say it aloud even to himself. His mother's hand touched his shoulder.

"Does hit hurt?" she said.

"Naw," he said. "Hit don't hurt. Lemme be."

"Can't you wipe some of the blood off before hit dries?"

"I'll wash to-night," he said, "Lemme be, I tell you."

The wagon went on. He did not know where they were going. None of them ever did or ever asked, because it was always somewhere, always a house of sorts waiting for them a day or two days or even three days away. Likely his father had already arranged to make a crop on another farm before he . . . Again he had to stop himself. He (the father) always did. There was something about his wolflike independence and even courage when the advantage was at least neutral which impressed strangers, as if they got from his latent ravening ferocity not so much a sense of dependability as a feeling that his ferocious conviction in the rightness of his own actions would be of advantage to all whose interest lay with his.

That night they camped, in a grove of oaks and beeches where a spring ran. The nights were still cool and they had a fire against it, of a rail lifted from a nearby fence and cut into lengths—a small fire, neat, niggard almost, a shrewd fire; such fires were his father's habit and custom always, even in freezing weather. Older, the boy might have remarked this and wondered why not a big one; why should not a man who had not only seen the waste and extravagance of war, but who had in his blood an inherent voracious prodigality with material not his own, have burned everything in sight? Then he might have gone a step farther and thought that that was the reason: that niggard blaze was the living fruit of nights passed during those four years in the woods hiding from all men, blue or gray, with his strings of horses (captured horses, he called them). And older still, he might have divined the true reason: that the element of fire spoke to some deep mainspring of his father's being, as the element of steel or of powder spoke to other men, as the one

weapon for the preservation of integrity, else breath were not worth the breathing, and hence to be regarded with respect and used with discretion.

But he did not think this now and he had seen those same niggard b'azes all his life. He merely ate his supper beside it and was already half asleep over his iron plate when his father called him, and once more he followed the stiff back, the stiff and ruthless limp, up the slope and on to the starlit road where, turning, he could see his father against the stars but without face or depth—a shape black, flat, and bloodless as though cut from tin in the iron folds of the frockcoat which had not been made for him, the voice harsh like tin and without heat like tin:

"You were fixing to tell them. You would have told him." He didn't answer. His father struck him with the flat of his hand on the side of the head, hard but without heat, exactly as he had struck the two mules at the store, exactly as he would strike either of them with any stick in order to kill a horse fly, his voice still without heat or anger: "You're getting to be a man. You got to learn. You got to learn to stick to your own blood or you ain't going to have any blood to stick to you. Do you think either of them, any man there this morning, would? Don't you know all they wanted was a chance to get at me because they knew I had them beat? Eh?" Later, twenty years later, he was to tell himself, "If I had said they wanted only truth, justice, he would have hit me again." But now he said nothing. He was not crying. He just stood there. "Answer me," his father said.

"Yes," he whispered. His father turned.

"Get on to bed. We'll be there tomorrow."

To-morrow they were there. In the early afternoon the wagon stopped before a paintless two-room house identical almost with the dozen others it had stopped before even in the boy's ten years, and again, as on the other dozen occa-

sions, his mother and aunt got down and began to unload the wagon, although his two sisters and his father and brother had not moved.

"Likely hit ain't fitten for hawgs," one of the sisters said.

"Nevertheless, fit it will and you'll hog it and like it," his father said. "Get out of them chairs and help your Ma unload."

The two sisters got down, big, bovine, in a flutter of cheap ribbons; one of them drew from the jumbled wagon bed a battered lantern, the other a worn broom. His father handed the reins to the older son and began to climb stiffly over the wheel. "When they get unloaded, take the team to the barn and feed them." Then he said, and at first the boy thought he was still speaking to his brother: "Come with me."

"Me?" he said.

"Yes," his father said. "You."

"Abner," his mother said. His father paused and looked back—the harsh level stare beneath the shaggy, graying, irascible brows.

"I reckon I'll have a word with the man that aims to begin to-morrow owning me body and soul for the next eight months."

They went back up the road. A week ago—or before last night, that is—he would have asked where they were going, but not now. His father had struck him before last night but never before had he paused afterward to explain why; it was as if the blow and the following calm, outrageous voice still rang, reperculated, divulging nothing to him save the terrible handicap of being young, the light weight of his few years, just heavy enough to prevent his soaring free of the world as it seemed to be ordered but not heavy enough to keep him footed solid in it, to resist it and try to change the course of its events.

Presently he could see the grove of oaks and cedars and the other flowering trees and shrubs where the house would be, though not the house yet. They walked beside a fence massed with honeysuckle and Cherokee roses and came to a gate swinging open between two brick pillars, and now, beyond a sweep of drive, he saw the house for the first time and at that instant he forgot his father and the terror and despair both, and even when he remembered his father again (who had not stopped) the terror and despair did not return. Because, for all the twelve movings, they had sojourned until now in a poor country, a land of small farms and fields and houses, and he had never seen a house like this before. *His big as a courthouse* he thought quietly, with a surge of peace and joy whose reason he could not have thought into words, being too young for that: *They are safe from him. People whose lives are a part of this peace and dignity are beyond his touch, he no more to them than a buzzing wasp: capable of stinging for a little moment but that's all; the spell of this peace and dignity rendering even the barns and stable and cribs which belong to it impervious to the puny flames he might contrive . . .* this, the peace and joy, ebbing for an instant as he looked again at the stiff black back, the stiff and implacable limp of the figure which was not dwarfed by the house, for the reason that it had never looked big anywhere and which now, against the serene columned backdrop, had more than ever that impervious quality of something cut ruthlessly from tin, depthless, as though, sidewise to the sun, it would cast no shadow. Watching him, the boy remarked the absolutely undeviating course which his father held and saw the stiff foot come squarely down in a pile of fresh droppings where a horse had stood in the drive and which his father could have avoided by a simple change of stride. But it ebbed only for a moment, though he could not have thought this into words either,

walking on in the spell of the house, which he could even want but without envy, without sorrow, certainly never with that ravening and jealous rage which unknown to him walked in the ironlike black coat before him: *Maybe he will feel it too. Maybe it will even change him now from what maybe he couldn't help but be.*

They crossed the portico. Now he could hear his father's stiff foot as it came down on the boards with clocklike finality, a sound out of all proportion to the displacement of the body it bore and which was not dwarfed either by the white door before it, as though it had attained to a sort of vicious and ravening minimum not to be dwarfed by anything—the fiat, wide, black hat, the formal coat of broadcloth which had once been black but which had now that friction-glazed greenish cast of the bodies of old house flies, the lifted sleeve which was too large, the lifted hand like a curled claw. The door opened so promptly that the boy knew the Negro must have been watching them all the time, an old man with neat grizzled hair, in a linen jacket, who stood barring the door with his body, saying, "Wipe yo foots, white man, fo you come in here. Major ain't home nohow."

"Get out of my way, nigger," his father said, without heat too, flinging the door back and the Negro also and entering, his hat still on his head. And now the boy saw the prints of the stiff foot on the doorjamb and saw them appear on the pale rug behind the machinelike deliberation of the foot which seemed to bear (or transmit) twice the weight which the body compassed. The Negro was shouting "Miss Lula! Miss Lula!" somewhere behind them, then the boy, deluged as though by a warm wave by a suave turn of carpeted stair and a pendant glitter of chandeliers and a mute gleam of gold frames, heard the swift feet and saw her too, a lady—perhaps he had never seen her like before either—in a gray, smooth gown with lace at the throat and an apron

tied at the waist and the sleeves turned back, wiping cake or biscuit dough from her hands with a towel as she came up the hall, looking not at his father at all but at the tracks on the blond rug with an expression of incredulous amazement.

"I tried," the Negro cried. "I tole him to . . ."

"Will you please go away?" she said in a shaking voice. "Major de Spain is not at home. Will ybu please go away?"

His father had not spoken again. He did not speak again. He did not even look at her. He just stood stiff in the center of the rug, in his hat, the shaggy iron-gray brows twitching slightly above the pebble-colored eyes as he appeared to examine the house with brief deliberation. Then with the same deliberation he turned; the boy watched him pivot on the good leg and saw the stiff foot drag round the arc of the turning, leaving a final long and fading smear. His father never looked at it, he never once looked down at the rug. The Negro held the door. It closed behind them, upon the hysteric and indistinguishable woman-wail. His father stopped at the top of the steps and scraped his boot clean on the edge of it. At the gate he stopped again. He stood for a moment, planted stiffly on the stiff foot, looking back at the house. "Pretty and white, ain't it?" he said. "That's sweat. Nigger sweat. Maybe it ain't white enough yet to suit him. Maybe he wants to mix some white sweat with it."

Two hours later the boy was chopping wood behind the house within which his mother and aunt and the two sisters (the mother and aunt, not the two girls, he knew that; even at this distance and muffled by walls the flat loud voices of the two girls emanated an incorrigible idle inertia) were setting up the stove to prepare a meal, when he heard the hooves and saw the linen-clad man on a fine sorrel mare, whom he recognized even before he saw the rolled rug in front of the Negro youth following on a fat bay carriage horse—a suffused, angry face vanishing, still at full gallop,

beyond the corner of the house where his father and brother were sitting in the two tilted chairs; and a moment later, almost before he could have put the axe down, he heard the hooves again and watched the sorrel mare go back out of the yard, already galloping again. Then his father began to shout one of the sisters' names, who presently emerged backward from the kitchen door dragging the rolled rug along the ground by one end while the other sister walked behind it.

"If you ain't going to tote, go on and set up the wash pot," the first said.

"You, Sarty!" the second shouted. "Set up the wash pot!" His father appeared at the door, framed against that shabbiness, as he had been against that other bland perfection, impervious to either, the mother's anxious face at his shoulder.

"Go on," the father said. "Pick it up." The two sisters stooped, broad, lethargic; stooping, they presented an incredible expanse of pale cloth and a flutter of tawdry ribbons.

"If I thought enough of a rug to have to git hit all the way from France I wouldn't keep hit where folks coming in would have to tromp on hit," the first said. They raised the rug.

"Abner," the mother said. "Let me do it."

"You go back and git dinner," his father said. "I'll tend to this."

From the woodpile through the rest of the afternoon the boy watched them, the rug spread flat in the dust beside the bubbling wash-pot, the two sisters stooping over it with that profound and lethargic reluctance, while the father stood over them in turn, implacable and grim, driving them though never raising his voice again. He could smell the harsh homemade lye they were using; he saw his mother come to the door once and look toward them with an ex-

pression not anxious now but very like despair; he saw his father turn, and he fell to with the axe and saw from the corner of his eye his father raise from the ground a flattish fragment of field stone and examine it and return to the pot, and this time his mother actually spoke: "Abner. Abner. Please don't. Please, Abner."

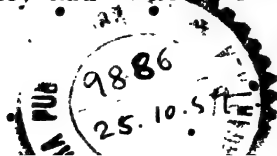
Then he was done too. It was dusk; the whippoorwills had already begun. He could smell coffee from the room where they would presently eat the cold food remaining from the mid-afternoon meal, though when he entered the house he realized they were having coffee again probably because there was a fire on the hearth, before which the rug now lay spread over the backs of the two chairs. The tracks of his father's foot were gone. Where they had been were now long, water-cloudy scoriations resembling the sporadic course of a lilliputian mowing machine.

It still hung there while they ate the cold food and then went to bed, scattered without order or claim up and down the two rooms, his mother in one bed, where his father would later lie, the older brother in the other, himself, the aunt, and the two sisters on pallets on the floor. But his father was not in bed yet. The last thing the boy remembered was the depthless, harsh silhouette of the hat and coat bending over the rug and it seemed to him that he had not even closed his eyes when the silhouette was standing over him, the fire almost dead behind it, the stiff foot prodding him awake. "Catch up the mule," his father said.

When he returned with the mule his father was standing in the black door, the rolled rug over his shoulder. "Ain't you going to ride?" he said.

"No. Give me your foot."

He bent his knee into his father's hand, the wiry, surprising power flowed smoothly, rising, he rising with it, on to the mule's bare back (they had owned a saddle once; the boy



could remember it though not when or where) and with the same effortlessness his father swung the rug up in front of him. Now in the starlight they retraced the afternoon's path, up the dusty road rife with honeysuckle, through the gate and up the black tunnel of the drive to the lightless house, where he sat on the mule and felt the rough warp of the rug drag across his thighs and vanish.

"Don't you want me to help?" he whispered. His father did not answer and now he heard again that stiff foot striking the hollow portico with that wooden and clocklike deliberation, that outrageous overstatement of the weight it carried. The rug, hunched, not flung (the boy could tell that even in the darkness) from his father's shoulder struck the angle of wall and floor with a sound unbelievably loud, thunderous, then the foot again, unhurried and enormous; a light came on in the house and the boy sat, tense, breathing steadily and quietly and just a little fast, though the foot itself did not increase its beat at all, descending the steps now; now the boy could see him.

"Don't you want to ride now?" he whispered. "We kin both ride now," the light within the house altering now, flaring up and sinking. *He's coming down the stairs now*, he thought. He had already ridden the mule up beside the horse block; presently his father was up behind him and he doubled the reins over and slashed the mule across the neck, but before the animal could begin to trot the hard, thin arm came round him, the hard, knotted hand jerking the mule back to a walk.

In the first red rays of the sun they were in the lot, putting plow gear on the mules. This time the sorrel mare was in the lot before he heard it at all, the rider collarless and even bareheaded, trembling, speaking in a shaking voice as the woman in the house had done. his father merely looking up

once before stooping again to the hame he was buckling, so that the man on the mare spoke to his stooping back:

"You must realize you have ruined that rug. Wasn't there anybody here, any of your women . . ." he ceased, shaking, the boy watching him, the older brother leaning now in the stable door, chewing, blinking slowly and steadily at nothing apparently. "It cost a hundred dollars. But you never had a hundred dollars. You never will. So I'm going to charge you twenty bushels of corn against your crop. I'll add it in your contract and when you come to the commissary you can sign it. That won't keep Mrs. de Spain quiet but maybe it will teach you to wipe your feet off before you enter her house again."

Then he was gone. The boy looked at his father, who still had not spoken or even looked up again, who was now adjusting the logger-head in the hame.

"Pap," he said. His father looked at him—the inscrutable face, the shaggy brows beneath which the gray eyes glinted coldly. Suddenly the boy went toward him, fast, stopping as suddenly. "You done the best you could!" he cried. "If he wanted hit done different why didn't he wait and tell you how? He won't git no twenty bushels! He won't git none! We'll gether hit and hide hit! I kin watch . . ."

"Did you put the cutter back in that straight stock like I told you?"

"No, sir," he said.

"Then go do it."

That was Wednesday. During the rest of that week he worked steadily, at what was within his scope and some which was beyond it, with an industry that did not need to be driven nor even commanded twice; he had this from his mother, with the difference that some at least of what he did he liked to do, such as splitting wood with the half-size axe which his mother and aunt had earned, or saved money

somehow, to present him with at Christmas. In company with the two older women (and on one afternoon, even one of the sisters), he built pens for the shoat and the cow which were a part of his father's contract with the landlord, and one afternoon, his father being absent, gone somewhere on one of the mules, he went to the field.

They were running a middle buster now, his brother holding the plow straight while he handled the reins, and walking beside the straining mule, the rich black soil shearing cool and damp against his bare ankles, he thought *Maybe this is the end of it. Maybe even that twenty bushels that seems hard to have to pay for just a rug will be a cheap price for him to stop forever and always from being what he used to be; thinking, dreaming now, so that his brother had to speak sharply to him to mind the mule: Maybe he even won't collect the twenty bushels. Maybe it will all add up and balance and vanish—corn, rug, fire; the terror and grief, the being pulled two ways like between two teams of horses—gone, done with for ever and ever.*

Then it was Saturday; he looked up from beneath the mule he was harnessing and saw his father in the black coat and hat. "Not that," his father said. "The wagon gear." And then, two hours later, sitting in the wagon bed behind his father and brother on the seat, the wagon accomplished a final curve, and he saw the weathered paintless store with its tattered tobacco- and patent-medicine posters and the tethered wagons and saddle animals below the gallery. He mounted the gnawed steps behind his father and brother, and there again was the lane of quiet, watching faces for the three of them to walk through. He saw the man in spectacles sitting at the plank table and he did not need to be told this was a Justice of the Peace; he sent one glare of fierce, exultant, partisan defiance at the man in collar and cravat now, whom he had seen but twice before in his life,

and that on a galloping horse, who now wore on his face an expression not of rage but of amazed unbelief which the boy could not have known was at the incredible circumstance of being sued by one of his own tenants, and came and stood against his father and cried at the Justice: "He ain't done it! He ain't burnt . . ."

"Go back to the wagon," his father said.

"Burnt?" the Justice said. "Do I understand this rug was burned too?"

"Does anybody here claim it was?" his father said. "Go back to the wagon." But he did not, he merely retreated to the rear of the room, crowded as that other had been, but not to sit down this time, instead, to stand pressing among the motionless bodies, listening to the voices:

"And you claim twenty bushels of corn is too high for the damage you did to the rug?"

"He brought the rug to me and said he wanted the tracks washed out of it. I washed the tracks out and took the rug back to him."

"But you didn't carry the rug back to him in the same condition it was in before you made the tracks on it."

His father did not answer, and now for perhaps half a minute there was no sound at all save that of breathing, the faint, steady suspiration of complete and intent listening.

"You decline to answer that, Mr. Snopes?" Again his father did not answer. "I'm going to find against you, Mr. Snopes. I'm going to find that you were responsible for the injury to Major de Spain's rug and hold you liable for it. But twenty bushels of corn seems a little high for a man in your circumstances to have to pay. Major de Spain claims it cost a hundred dollars. October corn will be worth about fifty cents. I figure that if Major de Spain can stand a ninety-five dollar loss on something he paid cash for, you can't stand a five-dollar loss you haven't earned yet. I hold you in dam-

ages to Major de Spain to the amount of ten bushels of corn over and above your contract with him, to be paid to him out of your crop at gathering time. Court adjourned."

It had taken no time hardly, the morning was but half begun. He thought they would return home and perhaps back to the field, since they were late, far behind all other farmers. But instead his father passed on behind the wagon, merely indicating with his hand for the older brother to follow with it, and crossed the road toward the blacksmith shop opposite, pressing on after his father, overtaking him, speaking, whispering up at the harsh, calm face beneath the weathered hat: "He won't git no ten bushels neither. He won't git one. We'll . . ." until his father glanced for an instant down at him, the face absolutely calm, the grizzled eyebrows tangled above the cold eyes, the voice almost pleasant, almost gentle:

"You think so? Well, we'll wait till October anyway."

The matter of the wagon—the setting of a spoke or two and the tightening of the tires—did not take long either, the business of the tires accomplished by driving the wagon into the spring branch behind the shop and letting it stand there, the mules nuzzling into the water from time to time, and the boy on the seat with the idle reins, looking up the slope and through the sooty tunnel of the shed where the slow hammer rang and where his father sat on an upended cypress bolt, easily, either talking or listening, still sitting there when the boy brought the dripping wagon up out of the branch and halted it before the door.

"Take them on to the shade and hitch," his father said. He did so and returned. His father and the smith and a third man squatting on his heels inside the door were talking, about crops and animals; the boy, squatting too in the ammoniac dust and hoof-parings and scales of rust, heard his father tell a long and unhurried story out of the time before

the birth of the older brother even when he had been a professional horsetrader. And then his father came up beside him where he stood before a tattered last year's circus poster on the other side of the store, gazing rapt and quiet at the scarlet horses, the incredible poisons and convolutions of tulle and tights and the painted leers of comedians, and said, "It's time to eat."

But not at home. Squatting beside his brother against the front wall, he watched his father emerge from the store and produce from a paper sack a segment of cheese and divide it carefully and deliberately into three with his pocket knife and produce crackers from the same sack. They all three squatted on the gallery and ate, slowly, without talking; then in the store again, they drank from a tin dipper tepid water smelling of the cedar bucket and of living beech trees. And still they did not go home. It was a horse lot this time, a tall rail fence upon and along which men stood and sat and out of which one by one horses were led, to be walked and trotted and then cantered back and forth along the road while the slow swapping and buying went on and the sun began to slant westward, they—the three of them—watching and listening, the older brother with his muddy eyes and his steady, inevitable tobacco, the father commenting now and then on certain of the animals, to no one in particular.

It was after sundown when they reached home. They ate supper by lamplight, then, sitting on the doorstep, the boy watched the night fully accomplish, listening to the whip-poorwills and the frogs, when he heard his mother's voice: "Abner! No! No! Oh, God. Oh, God. Abner!" and he rose, whirled, and saw the altered light through the door where a candle stub now burned in a bottle neck on the table and his father, still in the hat and coat, at once formal and burlesque as though dressed carefully for some shabby and ceremonial violence, emptying the reservoir of the lamp

back into the five-gallon kerosene can from which it had been filled, while the mother tugged at his arm until he shifted the lamp to the other hand and flung her back, not savagely or viciously, just hard, into the wall, her hands flung out against the wall for balance, her mouth open and in her face the same quality of hopeless despair as had been in her voice. Then his father saw him standing in the door.

"Go to the barn and get that can of oil we were oiling the wagon with," he said. The boy did not move. Then he could speak.

"What . . ." he cried. "What are you . . ."

"Go get that oil," his father said. "Go."

Then he was moving, running, outside the house, toward the stable: thus the old habit, the old blood which he had not been permitted to choose for himself, which had been bequeathed him willy nilly and which had run for so long (and who knew where, battenning on what of outrage and savagery and lust) before it came to him. *I could keep on*, he thought. *I could run on and on and never look back, never need to see his face again. Only I can't. I can't*, the rusted can in his hand now, the liquid splashing in it as he ran back to the house and into it, into the sound of his mother's weeping in the next room, and handed the can to his father.

"Ain't you going to even send a nigger?" he cried. "At least you sent a nigger before!"

This time his father didn't strike him. The hand came even faster than the blow had, the same hand which had set the can on the table with almost excruciating care flashing from the can toward him too quick for him to follow it, gripping him by the back of his shirt and on to tiptoe before he had seen it quit the can, the face stooping at him in breathless and frozen ferocity, the cold, dead voice speaking over him to the older brother who leaned against the table.

chewing with that steady, curious, sidewise motion of cows:

"Empty the can into the big one and go on. I'll catch up with you."

"Better tie him up to the bedpost," the brother said.

"Do like I told you," the father said. Then the boy was moving, his bunched shirt and the hard, bony hand between his shoulder-blades, his toes just touching the floor, across the room and into the other one, past the sisters sitting with spread heavy thighs in the two chairs over the cold hearth, and to where his mother and aunt sat side by side on the bed, the aunt's arms about his mother's shoulders. "

"Hold him," the father said. The aunt made a startled movement. "Not you," the father said. "Lennie. Take hold of him. I want to see you do it." His mother took him by the wrist. "You'll hold him better than that. If he gets loose don't you know what he is going to do? He will go up yonder." He jerked his head toward the road. "Maybe I'd better tie him."

"I'll hold him," his mother whispered.

"See you do then." Then his father was gone, the stiff foot heavy and measured upon the boards, ceasing at last.

Then he began to struggle. His mother caught him in both arms, he jerking and wrenching at them. He would be stronger in the end, he knew that. But he had no time to wait for it. "Lemme go!" he cried. "I don't want to have to hit you!"

"Let him go!" the aunt said. "If he don't go, before God, I am going up there myself!"

"Don't you see I can't?" his mother cried. "Sarty! Sarty! No! No! Help me, Lizzie!"

Then he was free. His aunt grasped at him but it was too late. He whirled, running, his mother stumbled forward on to her knees behind him, crying to the nearer sister: "Catch him, Net! Catch him!" But that was too late too, the sister

(the sisters were twins, born at the same time, yet either of them now gave the impression of being, encompassing as much living meat and volume and weight as any other two of the family) not yet having begun to rise from the chair, her head, face, alone merely turned, presenting to him in the flying instant an astonishing expanse of young female features untroubled by any surprise even, wearing only an expression of bovine interest. Then he was out of the room, out of the house, in the mild dust of the starlit road and the heavy ripeness of honeysuckle, the pale ribbon unspooling with terrific slowness under his running feet, reaching the gate at last and turning in, running, his heart and lungs drumming, on up the drive toward the lighted house, the lighted door. He did not knock, he burst in, sobbing for breath, incapable for the moment of speech; he saw the astonished face of the Negro in the linen jacket without knowing when the Negro had appeared.

"De Spain!" he cried, panted. "Where's . . ." then he saw the white man too emerging from a white door down the hall. "Barn!" he cried. "Barn!"

"What?" the white man said. "Barn?"

"Yes!" the boy cried. "Barn!"

"Catch him!" the white man shouted.

But it was too late this time too. The Negro grasped his shirt, but the entire sleeve, rotten with washing, carried away, and he was out that door too and in the drive again, and had actually never ceased to run even while he was screaming into the white man's face.

Behind him the white man was shouting, "My horse! Fetch my horse!" and he thought for an instant of cutting across the park and climbing the fence into the road, but he did not know the park nor how high the vine-massed fence might be and he dared not risk it. So he ran on down the drive, blood and breath roaring; presently he was in the

road again though he could not see it. He could not hear either: the galloping mare was almost upon him before he heard her, and even then he held his course, as if the very urgency of his wild grief and need must in a moment more find him wings, waiting until the ultimate instant to hurl himself aside and into the weed-choked roadside ditch as the horse thundered past and on, for an instant in furious silhouette against the stars, the tranquil early summer night sky which, even before the shape of the horse and rider vanished, stained abruptly and violently upward: a long, swirling roar incredible and soundless, blotting the stars, and he springing up and into the road again, running again, knowing it was too late yet still running even after he heard the shot and, an instant later, two shots, pausing now without knowing he had ceased to run, crying "Pap! Pap!", running again before he knew he had begun to run, stumbling, tripping over something and scrabbling up again without ceasing to run, looking backward over his shoulder at the glare as he got up, running on among the invisible trees, panting, sobbing, "Father! Father!"

At midnight he was sitting on the crest of a hill. He did not know it was midnight and he did not know how far he had come. But there was no glare behind him now and he sat now, his back toward what he had called home for four days anyhow, his face toward the dark woods which he would enter when breath was strong again, small, shaking steadily in the chill darkness, hugging himself into the remainder of his thin, rotten shirt, the grief and despair now no longer terror and fear but just grief and despair. *Father. My father*, he thought. "He was brave!" he cried suddenly, aloud but not loud, no more than a whisper "He was! He was in the war! He was in Colonel Sartoris' cav'ry!" not knowing that his father had gone to that war a private in the fine old European sense, wearing no uniform, admitting

the authority of and giving fidelity to no man or army or flag, going to war as Malbrouck himself did: for booty—it meant nothing and less than nothing to him if it were enemy booty or his own.

The slow constellations wheeled on. It would be dawn and then sun-up after a while and he would be hungry. But that would be to-morrow and now he was only cold, and walking would cure that. His breathing was easier now and he decided to get up and go on, and then he found that he had been asleep because he knew it was almost dawn, the night almost over. He could tell that from the whippoorwills. They were everywhere now among the dark trees below him, constant and inflectioned and ceaseless, so that, as the insects for giving over to the day birds drew nearer and nearer, there was no interval at all between them. He got up. He was a little stiff, but walking would cure that too as it would the cold, and soon there would be the sun. He went on down the hill, toward the dark woods within which the liquid silver voices of the birds called unceasing—the rapid and urgent beating of the urgent and quiring heart of the late spring night. He did not look back.

Death Drag

I

THE AIRPLANE appeared over town with almost the abruptness of an apparition. It was travelling fast; almost before we knew it was there it was already at the top of a loop; still over the square, in violation of both city and government ordinance. It was not a good loop either, performed viciously and slovenly and at top speed, as though the pilot were either a very nervous man or in a hurry, or (and this queerly: there is in our town an ex-army aviator. He was coming out of the post office when the airplane appeared going south; he watched the hurried and ungraceful loop and he made the comment) as though the pilot were trying to make the minimum of some specified manœuvre in order to save gasoline. The airplane came over the loop with one wing down, as though about to make an Immelmann turn. Then it did a half roll, the loop three-quarters complete, and without any break in the whine of the full-throttled engine and still at top speed and with that apparition-like suddenness, it disappeared eastward toward our airport. When the first small boys reached the field, the airplane was on the ground, drawn up into a fence corner at the end of the field. It was motionless and empty. There was no one in sight at all. Resting there, empty and dead, patched and shabby and painted awkwardly with a single thin coat of dead black, it gave again that illusion of ghostliness, as though it might have flown there and made that loop and landed by itself.

Our field is still in an embryonic state. Our town is built upon hills, and the field, once a cotton field, is composed of forty acres of ridge and gully, upon which, by means of grading and filling, we managed to build an X-shaped runway into the prevailing winds. The runways are long enough in themselves; but the field, like our town, is controlled by men who were of middle age when younger men first began to fly, and so the clearance is not always good. On one side is a grove of trees which the owner will not permit to be felled; on another is the barnyard of a farm: sheds and houses, a long barn with a roof of rotting shingles, a big haystack. The airplane had come to rest in the fence corner near the barn. The small boys and a Negro or two and a white man, descended from a halted wagon in the road, were standing quietly about it when two men in helmets and lifted goggles emerged suddenly around the corner of the barn. One was tall, in a dirty coverall. The other was quite short, in breeches and puttees and a soiled, brightly patterned overcoat which looked as if he had got wet in it and it had shrunk on him. He walked with a decided limp.

They had stopped at the corner of the barn. Without appearing to actually turn their heads, they seemed to take in at one glance the entire scene, quickly. The tall man spoke. "What town is this?"

One of the small boys told him the name of the town.

"Who lives here?" the tall man said.

"Who lives here?" the boy repeated.

"Who runs this field? Is it a private field?"

"Oh. It belongs to the town. They run it."

"Do they all live here? The ones that run it?"

The white man, the Negroes, the small boys, all watched the tall man.

"What I mean, is there anybody in this town that flies, that owns a ship? Any strangers here that fly?"

"Yes," the boy said. "There's a man lives here that flew in the war, the English army."

"Captain Warren was in the Royal Flying Corps," a second boy said.

"That's what I said," the first boy said.

"You said the English army," the second boy said.

The second man, the short one with the limp, spoke. He spoke to the tall man, quietly, in a dead voice, in the diction of Weber and Fields in vaudeville, making his *wh*'s into *v*'s and his *th*'s into *d*'s. "What does that mean?" he said.

"It's all right," the tall man said. He moved forward. "I think I know him." The short man followed, limping, terrific, crablike. The tall man had a gaunt face beneath a two-days' stubble. His eyeballs looked dirty, too, with a strained, glaring expression. He wore a dirty helmet of cheap, thin cloth, though it was January. His goggles were worn, but even we could tell that they were good ones. But then everybody quit looking at him to look at the short man; later, when we older people saw him, we said among ourselves that he had the most tragic face we had ever seen; an expression of outraged and convinced and indomitable despair, like that of a man carrying through choice a bomb which, at a certain hour each day, may or may not explode. He had a nose which would have been out of proportion to a man six feet tall. As shaped by his close helmet, the entire upper half of his head down to the end of his nose would have fitted a six-foot body. But below that, below a lateral line bisecting his head from the end of his nose to the back of his skull, his jaw, the rest of his face, was not two inches deep. His jaw was a long, flat line clapping-to beneath his nose like the jaw of a shark, so that the tip of his nose and the tip of his jaw almost touched. His goggles were merely flat pieces of window-glass held in felt frames. His helmet was leather. Down the back of it, from the top to the hem, was a long savage tear, held together

top and bottom by strips of adhesive tape almost black with dirt and grease.

From around the corner of the barn there now appeared a third man, again with that abrupt immobility, as though he had materialized there out of thin air; though when they saw him he was already moving toward the group. He wore an overcoat above a neat civilian suit; he wore a cap. He was a little taller than the limping man, and broad, heavily built. He was handsome in a dull, quiet way; from his face, a man of infrequent speech. When he came up the spectators saw that he, like the limping man, was also a Jew. That is, they knew at once that two of the strangers were of a different race from themselves, without being able to say what the difference was. The boy who had first spoken probably revealed by his next speech what they thought the difference was. He, as well as the other boys, was watching the man who limped.

"Were you in the war?" the boy said. "In the air war?"

The limping man did not answer. Both he and the tall man were watching the gate. The spectators looked also and saw a car enter the gate and come down the edge of the field toward them. Three men got out of the car and approached. Again the limping man spoke quietly to the tall man: "Is that one?"

"No," the tall man said, without looking at the other. He watched the newcomers, looking from face to face. He spoke to the oldest of the three. "Morning," he said. "You run this field?"

"No," the newcomer said. "You want the secretary of the Fair Association. He's in town."

"Any charge to use it?"

"I don't know. I reckon they'll be glad to have you use it."

"Go on and pay them," the limping man said.

The three newcomers looked at the airplane with that blank, knowing, respectful air of groundlings. It reared on its

muddy wheels, the propeller motionless, rigid, with a quality immobile and poised and dynamic. The nose was big with engine, the wings taut, the fuselage streaked with oil behind the rusting exhaust pipes. "Going to do some business here?" the oldest one said.

"Put you on a show," the tall man said.

"What kind of show?"

"Anything you want. Wing-waiking; death-drag."

"What's that? Death-drag?"

"Drop a man onto the top of a car and drag him off again. Bigger the crowd, the more you'll get."

"You will get your money's worth," the limping man said.

The boys still watched him. "Were you in the war?" the first boy said.

The third stranger had not spoken up to this time. He now said: "Let's get on to town."

"Right," the tall man said. He said generally, in his flat, dead voice, the same voice which the three strangers all seemed to use, as though it were their common language: "Where can we get a taxi? Got one in town?"

"We'll take you to town," the men who had come up in the car said.

"We'll pay," the limping man said.

"Glad to do it," the driver of the car said. "I won't charge you anything. You want to go now?"

"Sure," the tall man said. The three strangers got into the back seat, the other three in front. Three of the boys followed them to the car.

"Lemme hang on to town, Mr. Black?" one of the boys said.

"Hang on," the driver said. The boys got onto the running boards. The car returned to town. The three in front could hear the three strangers talking in the back. They talked quietly, in low, dead voices, somehow quiet and urgent, discussing something among themselves, the tall man and the

handsome one doing most of the talking. The three in front heard only one speech from the limping man: "I won't take less . . ."

"Sure," the tall man said. He leaned forward and raised his voice a little: "Where'll I find this Jones, this secretary?"

The driver told him.

"Is the newspaper or the printing shop near there? I want some handbills."

"I'll show you," the driver said. "I'll help you get fixed up."

"Fine," the tall man said. "Come out this afternoon and I'll give you a ride, if I have time."

The car stopped at the newspaper office. "You can get your handbills here," the driver said.

"Good," the tall man said. "Is Jones's office on this street?"

"I'll take you there, too," the driver said.

"You see about the editor," the tall man said. "I can find Jones, I guess." They got out of the car. "I'll come back here," the tall man said. He went on down the street, swiftly, in his dirty coverall and helmet. Two other men had joined the group before the newspaper office. They all entered, the limping man leading, followed by the three boys.

"I want some handbills," the limping man said. "Like this one." He took from his pocket a folded sheet of pink paper. He opened it; the editor, the boys, the five men, leaned to see it. The lettering was black and bold:

DEMON DUNCAN DAREDEVIL OF THE AIR

DEATH DEFYING SHOW WILL BE GIVEN
UNDER THE AUSPICES OF

THIS P.M. AT TWO P.M.

COME ONE COME ALL AND SEE DEMON DUNCAN
DEFY DEATH IN DEATH DROP & DRAG 'OF DEATH

"I want them in one hour," the limping man said.

"What you want in this blank space?" the editor said.

"What you got in this town?"

"What we got?"

"What auspices? American Legion? Rotary Club? Chamber of Commerce?"

"We got all of them."

"I'll tell you which one in a minute, then," the limping man said. "When my partner gets back."

"You have to have a guarantee before you put on the show, do you?" the editor said.

"Why, sure. Do you think I should put on a daredevil without auspices? Do you think I should for a nickel maybe jump off the airplane?"

"Who's going to jump?" one of the later comers said; he was a taxi-driver.

The limping man looked at him. "Don't you worry about that," he said. "Your business is just to pay the money. We will do all the jumping you want, if you pay enough."

"I just asked which one of you all was the jumper."

"Do I ask you whether you pay me in silver or in greenbacks?" the limping man said. "Do I ask you?"

"No," the taxi-driver said.

"About these bills," the editor said. "You said you wanted them in an hour."

"Can't you begin on them, and leave that part out until my partner comes back?"

"Suppose he don't come before they are finished?"

"Well, that won't be my fault, will it?"

"All right," the editor said. "Just so you pay for them."

"You mean, I should pay without a auspices on the hand-bill?"

"I ain't in this business for fun," the editor said.

"We'll wait," the limping man said.

They waited.

"Were you a flyer in the war, Mister?" the boy said.

The limping man turned upon the boy his long, misshapen, tragic face. "The war? Why should I fly in a war?"

"I thought maybe because of your leg. Captain Warren limps, and he flew in the war. I reckon you just do it for fun?"

"For fun? What for fun? Fly? Gruss Gott. I hate it, I wish the man what invented them was here; I would put him into that machine yonder and I would print on his back, Do not do it, one thousand times."

"Why do you do it, then?" the man who had entered with the taxi-driver said.

"Because of that Republican Coolidge. I was in business, and that Coolidge ruined business; ruined it. That's why. For fun? Gruss Gott."

They looked at the limping man. "I suppose you have a license?" the second late-comer said.

The limping man looked at him. "A license?"

"Don't you have to have a license to fly?"

"Oh; a license. For the airplane to fly; sure, I understand. Sure. We got one. You want to see it?"

"You're supposed to show it to anybody that wants to see it, aren't you?"

"Why, sure. You want to see it?"

"Where is it?"

"Where should it be? It's nailed to the airplane, where the government put it. Did you thought maybe it was nailed to me? Did you thought maybe I had a engine on me and maybe wings? It's on the airplane. Call a taxi and go to the airplane and look at it."

"I run a taxi," the driver said.

"Well, run it. Take this gentleman out to the field where he can look at the license on the airplane." ;

"It'll be a quarter," the driver said. But the limping man was not looking at the driver. He was leaning against the counter. They watched him take a stick of gum from his pocket and peel it. They watched him put the gum into his mouth. "I said it'll be a quarter, Mister," the driver said.

"Was you talking to me?" the limping man said.

"I thought you wanted a taxi out to the airport."

"Me? What for? What do I want to go out to the airport for? I just come from there. I ain't the one that wants to see that license. I have already seen it. I was there when the government nailed it onto the airplane."

II

CAPTAIN WARREN, the ex-army flyer, was coming out of the store, where he met the tall man in the dirty coverall. Captain Warren told about it in the barber shop that night, when the airplane was gone.

"I hadn't seen him in fourteen years, not since I left England for the front in '17. 'So it was you that rolled out of that loop with two passengers and a twenty model Hisso smokepot?' I said.

" 'Who else saw me?' he said. So he told me about it, standing there, looking over his shoulder every now and then. He was sick; a man stopped behind him to let a couple of ladies pass, and Jock whirled like he might have shot the man if he'd had a gun, and while we were in the café some one slammed a door at the back and I thought he would come out of his monkey suit. 'It's a little nervous trouble I've got,' he told me. 'I'm all right.' I had tried to get him to come out home with me for dinner, but he wouldn't. He said that he had to kind of jump himself and eat before he knew it, sort of. We had started down the street and we were passing the restaurant when he said: 'I'm going to eat,' and he turned

and ducked in like a rabbit and sat down with his back to the wall and told Vernon to bring him the quickest thing he had. He drank three glasses of water and then Vernon brought him a milk bottle full and he drank most of that before the dinner came up from the kitchen. When he took off his helmet, I saw that his hair was pretty near white, and he is younger than I am. Or he was, up there when we were in Canada training. Then he told me what the name of his nervous trouble was. It was named Ginsfarb. The little one; the one that jumped off the ladder."

"What was the trouble?" we asked. "What were they afraid of?"

"They were afraid of inspectors," Warren said. "They had no licenses at all."

"There was one on the airplane."

"Yes. But it did not belong to that airplane. That one had been grounded by an inspector when Ginsfarb bought it. The license was for another airplane that had been wrecked, and some one had helped Ginsfarb compound another felony by selling the license to him. Jock had lost his license about two years ago when he crashed a big plane full of Fourth-of-July holidayers. Two of the engines quit, and he had to land. The airplane smashed up some and broke a gas line, but even then they would have been all right if a passenger hadn't got scared (it was about dusk) and struck a match. Jock was not so much to blame, but the passengers all burned to death, and the government is strict. So he couldn't get a license, and he couldn't make Ginsfarb even pay to take out a parachute rigger's license. So they had no license at all; if they were ever caught, they'd all go to the penitentiary."

"No wonder his hair was white," some one said.

"That wasn't what turned it white," Warren said. "I'll tell you about that. So they'd go to little towns like this one, fast, find out if there was anybody that might catch them,

and if there wasn't, they'd put on the show and then clear out and go to another town, staying away from the cities. They'd come in and get handbills printed while Jock and the other one would try to get underwritten by some local organization. They wouldn't let Ginsfarb do this part, because he'd stick out for his price too long and they'd be afraid to risk it. So the other two would do this, get what they could, and if they could not get what Ginsfarb told them to, they'd take what they could and then try to keep Ginsfarb fooled until it was too late. Well, this time Ginsfarb kicked up. I guess they had done it too much on him.

"So I met Jock on the street. He looked bad; I offered him a drink, but he said he couldn't even smoke any more. All he could do was drink water; he said he usually drank about a gallon during the night, getting up for it.

" 'You look like you might have to jump yourself to sleep, too,' I said.

" 'No, I sleep fine. The trouble is, the nights aren't long enough. I'd like to live at the North Pole from September to April, and at the South Pole from April to September. That would just suit me.'

" 'You aren't going to last long enough to get there,' I said.

" 'I guess so. It's a good engine. I see to that.'

" 'I mean, you'll be in jail.'

" Then he said: 'Do you think so? Do you guess I could?'

" We went on to the café. He told me about the racket, and showed me one of those Demon Duncan handbills. 'Demon Duncan?' I said.

" 'Why not? Who would pay to see a man named Ginsfarb jump from a ship?'

" 'I'd pay to see that before I'd pay to see a man named Duncan do it,' I said.

" He hadn't thought of that. Then he began to drink water,

and he told me that Ginsfarb had wanted a hundred dollars for the stunt, but that he and the other fellow only got sixty.

"What are you going to do about it?" I said.

"Try to keep him fooled and get this thing over and get to hell away from here," he said.

"Which one is Ginsfarb?" I said. "The little one that looks like a shark?"

"Then he began to drink water. He emptied my glass too at one shot and tapped it on the table. Vernon brought him another glass. 'You must be thirsty,' Vernon said.

"Have you got a pitcher of it?" Jock said.

"I could fill you a milk bottle."

"Let's have it," Jock said. "And give me another glass while I'm waiting." Then he told me about Ginsfarb, why his hair had turned gray.

"How long have you been doing this?" I said.

"Ever since the 26th of August."

"This is just January," I said.

"What about it?"

"The 26th of August is not six months past."

He looked at me. Vernon brought the bottle of water. Jock poured a glass and drank it. He began to shake, sitting there, shaking and sweating, trying to fill the glass again. Then he told me about it, talking fast, filling the glass and drinking.

"Jake (the other one's name is Jake something; the good-looking one) drives the car, the rented car. Ginsfarb swaps onto the car from the ladder. Jock said he would have to fly the ship into position over a Ford or a Chevrolet running on three cylinders, trying to keep Ginsfarb from jumping from twenty or thirty feet away in order to save gasoline in the ship and in the rented car. Ginsfarb goes out on the bottom wing with his ladder, fastens the ladder onto a strut, hooks himself into the other end of the ladder, and drops off; everybody on the ground thinks that he has done what they all

came to see: fallen off and killed himself. That's what he calls his death-drop. Then he swaps from the ladder onto the top of the car, and the ship comes back and he catches the ladder and is dragged off again. That's his death-drag.

"Well, up till the day when Jock's hair began to turn white, Ginsfarb, as a matter of economy, would do it all at once; he would get into position above the car and drop off on his ladder and then make contact with the car, and sometimes Jock said the ship would not be in the air three minutes. Well, on this day the rented car was a bum or something; anyway, Jock had to circle the field four or five times while the car was getting into position, and Ginsfarb, seeing his money being blown out the exhaust pipes, finally refused to wait for Jock's signal and dropped off anyway. It was all right, only the distance between the ship and the car was not as long as the rope ladder. So Ginsfarb hit on the car, and Jock had just enough soup to zoom and drag Ginsfarb, still on the ladder, over a high-power electric line, and he held the ship in that climb for twenty minutes while Ginsfarb climbed back up the ladder with his leg broken. He held the ship in a climb with his knees, with the throttle wide open and the engine revving about eleven hundred, while he reached back and opened that cupboard behind the cockpit and dragged out a suitcase and propped the stick so he could get out on the wing and drag Ginsfarb back into the ship. He got Ginsfarb in the ship and on the ground again and Ginsfarb says: 'How far did we go?' and Jock told him they had flown with full throttle for thirty minutes and Ginsfarb says: 'Will you ruin me yet?'"

III

THE REST of this is composite. It is what we (groundlings, dwellers in and backbone of a small town interchangeable with and duplicate of ten thousand little dead clottings of

human life about the land) saw, refined and clarified by the expert, the man who had himself seen his own lonely and scudding shadow upon the face of the puny and remote earth.

The three strangers arrived at the field, in the rented car. When they got out of the car, they were arguing in tense, dead voices, the pilot and the handsome man against the man who limped. Captain Warren said they were arguing about the money.

"I want to see it," Ginsfarb said. They stood close; the handsome man took something from his pocket.

"There. There it is. See?" he said.

"Let me count it myself," Ginsfarb said.

"Come on, come on," the pilot hissed, in his dead, tense voice. "We tell you we got the money! Do you want an inspector to walk in and take the money and the ship too and put us in jail? Look at all these people waiting."

"You fooled me before," Ginsfarb said.

"All right," the pilot said. "Give it to him. Give him his ship too. And he can pay for the car when he gets back to town. We can get a ride in; there's a train out of here in fifteen minutes."

"You fooled me once before," Ginsfarb said.

"But we're not fooling you now. Come on. Look at all these people."

They moved toward the airplane, Ginsfarb limping terrifically, his back stubborn, his face tragic, outraged, cold. There was a good crowd: country people in overalls; the men a general dark clump against which the bright dresses of the women, the young girls, showed. The small boys and several men were already surrounding the airplane. We watched the limping man begin to take objects from the body of it: a parachute, a rope ladder. The handsome man went to the propeller. The pilot got into the back seat.

"Off!" he said, sudden and sharp. "Stand back, folks. We're going to wring the old bird's neck."

They tried three times to crank the engine.

"I got a mule, Mister," a countryman said. "How much'll you pay for a tow?"

The three strangers did not laugh. The limping man was busy attaching the rope ladder to one wing.

"You can't tell me," a countrywoman said. "Even he ain't that big a fool."

The engine started then. It seemed to lift bodily from the ground a small boy who stood behind it and blow him aside like a leaf. We watched it turn and trundle down the field.

"You can't tell me that thing's flying," the countrywoman said. "I reckon the Lord give me eyes. I can see it ain't flying. You folks have been fooled."

"Wait," another voice said. "He's got to turn into the wind."

"Ain't there as much wind right there or right here as there is down yonder?" the woman said. But it did fly. It turned back toward us; the noise became deafening. When it came broadside on to us, it did not seem to be going fast, yet we could see daylight beneath the wheels and the earth. But it was not going fast; it appeared rather to hang gently just above the earth until we saw that, beyond and beneath it, trees and earth in panorama were fleeing backward at dizzy speed, and then it tilted and shot skyward with a noise like a circular saw going into a white oak log. "There ain't nobody in it!" the countrywoman said. "You can't tell me!"

The third man, the handsome one in the cap, had got into the rented car. We all knew it: a battered thing which the owner would rent to any one who would make a deposit of ten dollars. He drove to the end of the field, faced down the runway, and stopped. We looked back at the airplane. It

was high, coming back toward us; some one cried suddenly, his voice puny and thin: "There! Out on the wing! See?"

"It ain't," the countrywoman said. "I don't believe it!"

"You saw them get in it," some one said.

"I don't believe it!" the woman said.

Then we sighed; we said, "Aaahhhhhhh"; beneath the wing of the airplane there was a falling-dot. We knew it was a man. Some way we knew that that lonely, puny, falling shape was that of a living man like ourselves. It fell. It seemed to fall for years, yet when it checked suddenly up without visible rope or cord, it was less far from the airplane than was the end of the delicate pen-slash of the profiled wing.

"It ain't a man!" the woman shrieked.

"You know better," the man said. "You saw him get in it."

"I don't care!" the woman cried. "It ain't a man! You take me right home this minute!"

The rest is hard to tell. Not because we saw so little; we saw everything that happened, but because we had so little in experience to postulate it with. We saw that battered rented car moving down the field, going faster, jouncing in the broken January mud, then the sound of the airplane blotted it, reduced it to immobility; we saw the dangling ladder and the shark-faced man swinging on it beneath the death-colored airplane. The end of the ladder raked right across the top of the car, from end to end, with the limping man on the ladder and the capped head of the handsome man leaning out of the car. And the end of the field was coming nearer, and the airplane was travelling faster than the car, passing it. And nothing happened. "Listen!" some one cried. "They are talking to one another!"

Captain Warren told us what they were talking about, the two Jews yelling back and forth at one another: the shark-

faced man on the dangling ladder that looked like a cobweb, the other one in the car; the fence, the end of the field, coming closer.

"Come on!" the man in the car shouted.

"What did they pay?"

"Jump!"

"If they didn't pay that hundred, I won't do it."

Then the airplane zoomed, roaring, the dangling figure on the gossamer ladder swinging beneath it. It circled the field twice while the man got the car into position again. Again the car started down the field; again the airplane came down with its wild, circular-saw drone which died into a splutter as the ladder and the clinging man swung up to the car from behind. Again we heard the two puny voices shrieking at one another with a quality at once ludicrous and horrible: the one coming out of the very air itself, shrieking about something sweated out of the earth and without value anywhere else:

"How much did you say?"

"Jump!"

"What? How much did they pay?"

"Nothing! Jump!"

"Nothing?" the man on the ladder wailed in a fading, outraged shriek. "Nothing?" Again the airplane was dragging the ladder irrevocably past the car, approaching the end of the field, the fences, the long barn with its rotting roof. Suddenly we saw Captain Warren beside us; he was using words we had never heard him use.

"He's got the stick between his knees," Captain Warren said. "Exalted suzerain of mankind; saccharine and sacred symbol of eternal rest." We had forgot about the pilot, the man still in the airplane. We saw the airplane, tilted upward, the pilot standing upright in the back seat, leaning over the side and shaking both hands at the man on the ladder. We

could hear him yelling now as again the man on the ladder was dragged over the car and past it, shrieking:

"I won't do it! I won't do it!" He was still shrieking when the airplane zoomed; we saw him, a diminishing and shrieking spot against the sky above the long roof of the barn: "I won't do it! I won't do it!" Before, when the speck left the airplane, falling, to be snubbed up by the ladder, we knew that it was a living man; again, when the speck left the ladder, falling, we knew that it was a living man, and we knew that there was no ladder to snub him up now. We saw him falling against the cold, empty January sky until the silhouette of the barn absorbed him; even from here, his attitude froglike, outraged, implacable. From somewhere in the crowd a woman screamed, though the sound was blotted out by the sound of the airplane. It reared skyward with its wild, tearing noise, the empty ladder swept backward beneath it. The sound of the engine was like a groan, a groan of relief and despair.

IV

CAPTAIN WARREN told us in the barber shop on that Saturday night.

"Did he really jump off, onto that barn?" we asked him.

"Yes. He jumped. He wasn't thinking about being killed, or even hurt. That's why he wasn't hurt. He was too mad, too in a hurry to receive justice. He couldn't wait to fly back down. Providence knew that he was too busy and that he deserved justice, so Providence put that barn there with the rotting roof. He wasn't even thinking about hitting the barn; if he'd tried to, let go of his belief in a cosmic balance to bother about landing, he would have missed the barn and killed himself."

It didn't hurt him at all, save for a long scratch on his face

that bled a lot, and his overcoat was torn completely down the back, as though the tear down the back of the helmet had run on down the overcoat. He came out of the barn running before we got to it. He hobbled right among us, with his bloody face, his arms waving, his coat dangling from either shoulder.

"Where is that secretary?" he said.

"What secretary?"

"That American Legion secretary." He went on, limping fast, toward where a crowd stood about three women who had fainted. "You said you would pay a hundred dollars to see me swap to that car. We pay rent on the car and all, and now you would—"

"You got sixty dollars," some one said.

The man looked at him. "Sixty? I said one hundred. Then you would let me believe it was one hundred and it was just sixty; you would see me risk my life for sixty dollars. . . ." The airplane was down; none of us were aware of it until the pilot sprang suddenly upon the man who limped. He jerked the man around and knocked him down before we could grasp the pilot. We held the pilot, struggling, crying, the tears streaking his dirty, unshaven face. Captain Warren was suddenly there, holding the pilot.

"Stop it!" he said. "Stop it!"

The pilot ceased. He stared at Captain Warren, then he slumped and sat on the ground in his thin, dirty garment, with his unshaven face, dirty, gaunt, with his sick eyes, crying. "Go away." Captain Warren said. "Let him alone for a minute."

We went away, back to the other man, the one who limped. They had lifted him and he drew the two halves of his overcoat forward and looked at them. Then he said: "I want some chewing gum."

Some one gave him a stick. Another offered him a ciga-

rette. "Thanks," he said. "I don't burn up no money. I ain't got enough of it yet." He put the gum into his mouth. "You would take advantage of me. If you thought I would risk my life for sixty dollars, you fool yourself."

"Give him the rest of it," some one said. "Here's my share."

The limping man did not look around. "Make it up to a hundred, and I will swap to the car like on the handbill," he said.

Somewhere a woman screamed behind him. She began to laugh and to cry at the same time. "Don't . . ." she said, laughing and crying at the same time. "Don't let . . ." until they led her away. Still the limping man had not moved. He wiped his face on his cuff and he was looking at his bloody sleeve when Captain Warren came up.

"How much is he short?" Warren said. They told Warren. He took out some money and gave it to the limping man.

"You want I should swap to the car?" he said.

"No," Warren said. "You get that crate out of here quick as you can."

"Well, that's your business," the limping man said. "I got witnesses I offered to swap." He moved; we made way and watched him, in his severed and dangling overcoat, approach the airplane. It was on the runway, the engine running. The third man was already in the front seat. We watched the limping man crawl terrifically in beside him. They sat there, looking forward.

The pilot began to get up. Warren was standing beside him. "Ground it," Warren said. "You are coming home with me."

"I guess we'd better get on," the pilot said. He did not look at Warren. Then he put out his hand. "Well . . ." he said.

Warren did not take his hand. "You come on home with me," he said.

"Who'd take care of that bastard?"

"Who wants to?"

"I'll get him right, some day. Where I can beat hell out of him."

"Jock," Warren said.

"No," the other said.

"I have you got an overcoat?"

"Sure I have."

"You're a liar." Warren began to pull off his overcoat.

"No," the other said; "I don't need it." He went on toward the machine. "See you some time," he said over his shoulder. We watched him get in, heard an airplane come to life, come alive. It passed us, already off the ground. The pilot jerked his hand over, stiffly; the two heads in the front seat did not turn nor move. Then it was gone, the sound was gone.

Warren turned. "What about that car they rented?" he said.

"He give me a quarter to take it back to town," a boy said.

"Can you drive it?"

"Yes, sir. I drove it out here. I showed him where to rent it."

"The one that jumped?"

"Yes, sir." The boy looked a little aside. "Only I'm a little scared to take it back. I don't reckon you could come with me."

"Why, scared?" Warren said

"That fellow never paid nothing down on it, like Mr. Harris wanted. He told Mr. Harris he might not use it, but if he did use it in his show, he would pay Mr. Harris twenty dollars for it instead of ten like Mr. Harris wanted. He told me to take it back and tell Mr. Harris he never used the car. And I don't know if Mr. Harris will like it. He might get mad."

BORDERING THE SHEER DROP of the precipice, the wooden railing looked like a child's toy. It followed the curving road in thread-like embrace, passing the car in a flimsy blur. Then it flicked behind and away like a taut ribbon cut with scissors.

Then they passed the sign, the first sign, *Mills City. 6 mi* and Elly thought with musing and irrevocable astonishment, 'Now we are almost there. It is too late now'; looking at Paul beside her, his hands on the wheel, his face in profile as he watched the fleeing road. She said, "Well. What can I do to make you marry me, Paul?" thinking 'There was a man plowing in that field, watching us when we came out of those woods with Paul carrying the motor-robe, and got back into the car,' thinking this quietly, with a certain detachment and inattention, because there was something else about to obliterate it. 'Something dreadful that I have forgotten about,' she thought, watching the swift and increasing signs which brought Mills City nearer and nearer. 'Something terrible that I shall remember in a minute,' saying aloud, quietly: "There's nothing else I can do now, is there?"

Still Paul did not look at her. "No," he said. "There's nothing else you can do."

Then she remembered what it was she had forgotten. She remembered her grandmother, thinking of the old woman

with her dead hearing and her inescapable cold eyes waiting at Mills City, with amazed and quiet despair: 'How could I have ever forgot about her? How could I have? How could I?'

She was eighteen. She lived in Jefferson, two hundred miles away, with her father and mother and grandmother, in a biggish house. It had a deep veranda with screening vines and no lights. In this shadow she half lay, almost nightly with a different man—youths and young men of the town at first, but later with almost anyone, any transient in the small town whom she met by either convention or by chance, provided his appearance was decent. She would never ride in their cars with them at night, and presently they all believed that they knew why, though they did not always give up hope at once—until the courthouse clock struck eleven. Then for perhaps five minutes longer they (who had been practically speechless for an hour or more) would talk in urgent whispers:

"You must go now."

"No. Not now."

"Yes. Now."

"Why?"

"Because. I'm tired. I want to go to bed."

"I see. So far, and no mother. Is that it?"

"Maybe." In the shadow now she would be alert, cool, already fled, without moving, beyond some secret reserve of laughter. And he would leave, and she would enter the dark house and look up at the single square of light which fell upon the upper hallway, and change completely. Wearily now, with the tread almost of an old woman, she would mount the stairs and pass the open door of the lighted room where her grandmother sat, erect, an open book in her hands, facing the hall. Usually she did not look into the room when she passed. But now and then, she did. Then

for an instant they would look full at one another: the old woman cold, piercing; the girl weary, spent, her face, her dark dilated eyes, filled with impotent hatred. Then she would go on and enter her own room and lean for a time against the door, hearing the grandmother's light click off presently, sometimes crying silently and hopelessly, whispering, "The old bitch. The old bitch." Then this would pass. She would undress and look at her face in the mirror, examining her mouth now pale of paint and heavy, flattened (so she would believe) and weary and dulled with kissing, thinking 'My God. Why do I do it? What is the matter with me?' thinking of how tomorrow she must face the old woman again with the mark of last night upon her mouth like bruise, with a feeling of the pointlessness and emptiness of life more profound than the rage or the sense of persecution.

Then one afternoon at the home of a girl friend she met Paul de Montigny. After he departed the two girls were alone. Now they looked at one another quietly, like two swordsmen, with veiled eyes.

"So you like him, do you?" the friend said. "You've got queer taste, haven't you?"

"Like who?" Elly said. "I don't know who you are talking about."

"Oh yeah?" the friend said. "You didn't notice his hair then. Like a knitted cap. And his lips. Blubber, almost." Elly looked at her.

"What are you talking about?" Elly said.

"Nothing," the other said. She glanced toward the hall, then she took a cigarette from the front of her dress and lit it. "I don't know anything about it. I just heard it, too. How his uncle killed a man once that accused him of having nigger blood."

"You're lying," Elly said.

The other expelled smoke. "All right. Ask your grandmother about his family. Didn't she used to live in Louisiana too?"

"What about you?" Elly said. "You invited him into your house."

"I wasn't hid in the cloak closet, kissing him, though."

"Oh, yeah?" Elly said. "Maybe you' couldn't."

"Not till you got your face out of the way, anyhow," the other said.

That night she and Paul sat on the screened and shadowed veranda. But at eleven o'clock it was she who was urgent and tense: "No! No! Please. Please."

"Oh, come on. What are you afraid of?"

"Yes. I'm afraid. Go, please. Please."

"Tomorrow, then?"

"No. Not tomorrow or any time."

"Yes. Tomorrow."

This time she did not look in when she passed her grandmother's door. Neither did she lean against her own door to cry. But she was panting, saying aloud against the door in thin exultation: "A nigger. A nigger. I wonder what she would say if she knew about that."

The next afternoon Paul walked up onto the veranda. Elly was sitting in the swing, her grandmother in a chair nearby. She rose and met Paul at the steps. "Why did you come here?" she said. "Why did you?" Then she turned and seemed to watch herself walking before him toward the thin old woman sitting bolt upright, sitting bolt and implacably chaste in that secret place, peopled with ghosts, very likely to Elly at any given moment uncountable and unnamable, who might well have owned one single mouth. She leaned down, screaming: "This is Mr. de Montigny, Grandmother!"

"What?"

"Mr. de Montigny! From Louisiana!" she screamed, and saw the grandmother, without moving below the hips, start violently backward as a snake does to strike. That was in the afternoon. That night Elly quitted the veranda for the first time. She and Paul were in a close clump of shrubbery on the lawn; in the wild close dark for that instant Elly was lost, her blood aloud with desperation and exultation and vindication too, talking inside her at the very brink of surrender loud as a voice: "I wish she were here to see! I wish she were here to see!" when something—there had been no sound—shouted at her and she made a mad awkward movement of recovery. The grandmother stood just behind and above them. When she had arrived, how long she had been there, they did not know. But there she stood, saying nothing, in the long anti-climax while Paul departed without haste and Elly stood, thinking stupidly, 'I am caught in sin without even having time to sin.' Then she was in her room, leaning against the door, trying to still her breathing, listening for the grandmother to mount the stairs and go to her father's room. But the old woman's footsteps ceased at her own door. Elly went to her bed and lay upon it without undressing, still panting, the blood still aloud. 'So,' she thought, 'it will be tomorrow. She will tell him in the morning.' Then she began to writhe, to toss lightly from side to side. 'I didn't even have a chance to sin,' she thought, with panting and amazed regret. 'She thinks I did and she will tell that I did, yet I am still virgin. She drove me to it, then prevented me at the last moment.' Then she was lying with the sun in her eyes still fully dressed. 'So it will be this morning, today,' she thought dully. 'My God. How could I. How could I. I don't want any man, anything.'

She was waiting in the dining-room when her father came down to breakfast. He said nothing, apparently knew nothing. 'Maybe it's mother she told,' Elly thought. But after a

while her mother, too, appeared and departed for town also, saying nothing. 'So it has not been yet,' she thought, mounting the stairs. Her grandmother's door was closed. When she opened it, the old woman was sitting up in bed, reading a newspaper; she looked up, cold, still, implacable, while Elly screamed at her in the empty house: "What else can I do, in this little dead, hopeless town? I'll work. I don't want to be idle. Just find me a job—anything, anywhere, so that it's so far away that I'll never have to hear the word Jefferson again." She was named for the grandmother—Ailanthia, though the old woman had not heard her own name or her granddaughter's or anyone else's in almost fifteen years save when it was screamed at her as Elly now screamed: "It hadn't even happened last night! Won't you believe me? That's it. It hadn't even happened! At least, I would have had something, something . . ." with the other watching her with that cold, fixed, immobile, inescapable gaze of the very deaf. "All right!" Elly cried. "I'll get married then! Will you be satisfied then?"

That afternoon she met Paul downtown. "Was everything all right last night?" he said. "Why, what is it? Did they—"

"No. Paul, marry me." They were in the rear of the drugstore, partially concealed by the prescription counter, though anyone might appear behind it at any moment. She leaned against him, her face wan, tense, her painted mouth like a savage scar upon it. "Marry me. Or it will be too late, Paul."

"I don't marry them," Paul said. "Here. Pull yourself together."

She leaned against him, rife with promise. Her voice was wan and urgent. "We almost did last night. If you'll marry me, I will."

"You will, eh? Before or after?"

"Yes. Now. Any time."

"I'm sorry," he said.

"Not even if I will now?"

"Come on, now. Pull yourself together."

"Oh, I can hear you. But I don't believe you. And I am afraid to try and find out." She began to cry. He spoke in thin and mounting annoyance:

"Stop it, I tell you!"

"Yes. All right. I've stopped. You won't, then? I tell you, it will be too late."

"Hell, no. I don't marry them. I tell you."

"All right. Then it's good-bye, forever."

"That's O.K. by me, too. If that's how you feel. If I ever see you again, you know what it will mean. But no marrying. And I'll see next time that we don't have any audience."

"There won't be any next time," Elly said.

The next day he was gone. A week later, her engagement was in the Memphis papers. It was to a young man whom she had known from childhood. He was assistant cashier in the bank, who they said would be president of it some day. He was a grave, sober young man of impeccable character and habits, who had been calling on her for about a year with a kind of placid formality. He took supper with the family each Sunday night, and when infrequent road shows came to town he always bought tickets for himself and Elly and her mother. When he called on her, even after the engagement was announced, they did not sit in the dark swing. Perhaps he did not know that anyone had ever sat in it in the darkness. No one sat in it at all now, and Elly passed the monotonous round of her days in a kind of dull peace. Sometimes at night she cried a little, though not often; now and then she examined her mouth in the glass and cried quietly, with quiet despair and resignation. 'Anyway I can live quietly now,' she thought. 'At least I can live out the rest of my dead life as quietly as if I were already dead.'

Then one day, without warning, as though she, too, had

accepted the armistice and the capitulation, the grandmother departed to visit her son in Mills City. Her going seemed to leave the house bigger and emptier than it had ever been, as if the grandmother had been the only other actually living person in it. There were sewing women in the house daily now, making the trousseau, yet Elly seemed to herself to move quietly and aimlessly, in a hiatus without thought or sense, from empty room to empty room giving upon an identical prospect too familiar and too peaceful to be even saddening any longer. For long hours now she would stand at her mother's bedroom window, watching the slow and infinitesimal clematis tendrils as they crept and overflowed up the screen and onto the veranda roof with the augmenting summer. Two months passed so; she would be married in three weeks. Then one day her mother said, "Your grandmother wants to come home Sunday. Why don't you and Philip drive down to Mills City and spend Saturday night with your uncle, and bring her back Sunday?" Five minutes later, at the mirror, Elly looked at her reflection as you look at someone who has just escaped a fearful danger. 'God,' she thought, 'what was I about to do? *What was I about to do?*'

Within the hour she had got Paul on the telephone, leaving home to do it, taking what precautions for secrecy her haste would afford her.

"Saturday morning?" he said.

"Yes. I'll tell mother Phi . . . he wants to leave early, at daylight. They won't recognize you or the car. I'll be ready and we can get away quick."

"Yes." She could hear the wire, distance; she had a feeling of exultation, escape. "But you know what it means. If I come back. What I told you."

"I'm not afraid. I still don't believe you, but I am not afraid to try it now."

Again she could hear the wire. "I'm not going to marry you, Elly."

"All right, darling. I tell you I'm not afraid to try it any more. Exactly at daylight. I'll be waiting."

She went to the bank. After a time Philip was free and came to her where she waited, her face tense and wan beneath the paint, her eyes bright and hard. "There is something you must do for me. It's hard to ask, and I guess it will be hard to do."

"Of course I'll do it. What is it?"

"Grandmother is coming home Sunday. Mother wants you and me to drive down Saturday and bring her back."

"All right. I can get away Saturday."

"Yes. You see, I told you it would be hard. I don't want you to go."

"Don't want me to . . ." He looked at her bright, almost haggard face. "You want to go alone?" She didn't answer, watching him. Suddenly she came and leaned against him with a movement practiced, automatic. She took one of his arms and drew it around her. "Oh," he said. "I see. You want to go with someone else."

"Yes. I can't explain now. But I will later. But mother will never understand. She won't let me go unless she thinks it is you."

"I see." His arm was without life; she held it about her. "It's another man you want to go with."

She laughed, not loud, not long. "Don't be foolish. Yes. There's another man in the party. People you don't know and that I don't expect to see again before I am married. But mother won't understand. That's why I must ask you. Will you do it?"

"Yes. It's all right. If we can't trust one another, we haven't got any business marrying."

"Yes. We must trust one another." She released his arm.

She looked at him intently, speculatively, with a cold and curious contempt. "And you'll let mother believe . . ."

"You can trust me. You know that."

"Yes. I'm sure I can." Suddenly she held out her hand. "Good-bye."

"Good-bye?"

She leaned against him again. She kissed him. "Careful," he said. "Somebody might . . ."

"Yes. Until later, then. Until I explain." She moved back, looked at him absently, speculatively. "This is the last trouble I'll ever give you, I expect. Maybe this will be worth that to you. Good-bye."

That was Thursday afternoon. On Saturday morning, at dawn, when Paul stopped his car before the dark house, she seemed to materialize at once, already running across the lawn. She sprang into the car before he could descend and open the door, swirling down into the seat, leaning forward and taut with urgency and flight like an animal. "Hurry!" she said. "Hurry! Hurry! I hurry!"

But he held the car a moment longer. "Remember. I told you what it meant if I came back. O.K.?"

"I heard you. I tell you I'm not afraid to risk it now. Hurry! Hurry!"

And then, ten hours later, with the Mills City signs increasing with irrevocable diminishment, she said, "So you won't marry me? You won't?"

"I told you that all the time."

"Yes. But I didn't believe you. I didn't believe you. I thought that when I—after— And now there is nothing else I can do, is there?"

"No," he said.

"No," she repeated. Then she began to laugh, her voice beginning to rise.

"Elly!" he said. "Stop it, now!"

"All right," she said. "I just happened to think about my grandmother. I had forgotten her."

Pausing at the turn of the stair, Elly could hear Paul and her uncle and aunt talking in the living-room below. She stood quite still, in an attitude almost pensive, nun-like, virginal, as though posing, as though she had escaped for the moment into a place where she had forgotten where she came from and where she intended to go. Then a clock in the hall struck eleven, and she moved. She went on up the stairs quietly and went to the door of her cousin's room, which she was to occupy for the night, and entered. The grandmother sat in a low chair beside the dressing table littered with the frivolous impedimenta of a young girl . . . bottles, powder puffs, photographs, a row of dance programs stuck into the mirror frame. Elly paused. They looked at one another for a full moment before the old woman spoke: "Not contented with deceiving your parents and your friends, you must bring a Negro into my son's house as a guest."

"Grandmother!" Elly said.

"Having me sit down to table with a negro man."

"Grandmother!" Elly cried in that thin whisper, her face haggard and grimaced. She listened. Feet, voices were coming up the stairs, her aunt's voice and Paul's. "Hush!" Elly cried. "Hush!"

"What? What did you say?"

Elly ran to the chair and stooped and laid her fingers on the old woman's thin and bloodless lips and, one furiously importunate and the other furiously implacable, they glared eye to eye across the hand while the feet and the voices passed the door and ceased. Elly removed her hand. From the row of them in the mirror frame she jerked one of the cards with its silken cord and tiny futile pencil. She wrote

on the back of the card. *He is not a negro he went to Va. and Harvard and everywhere.*

The grandmother read the card. She looked up, "I can understand Harvard, but not Virginia. Look at his hair, his fingernails, if you need proof. I don't. I know the name which his people have borne for four generations." She returned the card. "That man must not sleep under this roof."

Elly took another card and scrawled swiftly. *He shall. He is my guest. I asked him here. You are my grandmother you would not have me treat any guest that way not even a dog.*

The grandmother read it. She sat with the card in her hand. "He shall not drive me to Jefferson. I will not put a foot in that car, and you shall not. We will go home on the train. No blood of mine shall ride with him again."

Elly snatched another card, scrawled furiously. *I will. You cannot stop me. Try and stop me.*

The grandmother read it. She looked at Elly. They glared at one another. "Then I will have to tell your father."

Already Elly was writing again. She thrust the card at her grandmother almost before the pencil had ceased; then in the same motion she tried to snatch it back. But the grandmother had already grasped the corner of it and now they glared at one another, the card joining them like a queer umbilical cord. "Let go!" Elly cried. "Let it go!"

"Turn loose," the grandmother said.

"Wait," Elly cried thinly, whispering, tugging at the card, twisting it. "I made a mistake. I—" With an astonishing movement, the grandmother bent the card up as Elly tried to snatch it free.

"Ah," she said, then she read aloud: *Tell him. What do you know.* "So. You didn't finish it, I see. What do I know?"

"Yes," Elly said. Then she began to speak in a fierce whisper: "Tell him! Tell him we went into a clump of trees this morning and stayed there two hours. Tell him!" The

grandmother folded the card carefully and quietly. She rose. "Grandmother!" Elly cried.

"My stick," the grandmother said. "There; against the wall."

When she was gone Elly went to the door and turned the latch and recrossed the room. She moved quietly, getting a robe of her cousin's from the closet, and undressed, slowly, pausing to yawn terrifically. "God, I'm tired," she said aloud, yawning. She sat down at the dressing table and began to manicure her nails with the cousin's equipment. There was a small ivory clock on the dressing table. She glanced at it now and then.

Then the clock below stairs struck midnight. She sat for a moment longer with her head above her glittering nails, listening to the final stroke. Then she looked at the ivory one beside her. 'I'd hate to catch a train by you,' she thought. As she looked at it her face began again to fill with the weary despair of the afternoon. She went to the door and passed into the dark hall. She stood in the darkness, on her naked feet, her head bent, whimpering quietly to herself with bemused and childish self-pity. 'Everything's against me,' she thought. 'Everything.' When she moved, her feet made no sound. She walked with her arms extended into the darkness. She seemed to feel her eyeballs turning completely and blankly back into her skull with the effort to see. She entered the bathroom and locked the door. Then haste and urgency took her again. She ran to the angle of the wall beyond which the guest room was and stooped, cupping her voice into the angle with her hands. "Paul!" she whispered, "Paul!" holding her breath while the dying and urgent whisper failed against the cold plaster. She stooped, awkward in the borrowed robe, her blind eyes unceasing in the darkness with darting despair. She ran to the lavatory, found the tap in the darkness and tempered the drip of water to a minor but

penetrating monotony. Then she opened the door and stood just within it. She heard the clock below stairs strike the half hour. She had not stirred, shaking slowly as with cold, when it struck one.

She heard Paul as soon as he left the guest room. She heard him come down the hall; she heard his hand seek the switch. When it clicked on, she found that her eyes were closed.

"What's this?" Paul said. He wore a suit of her uncle's pajamas. "What the devil—"

"Lock the door," she whispered.

"Like hell. You fool. You damned fool."

"Paul!" She held him as though she expected him to flee. She shut the door behind him and fumbled for the latch when he caught her wrist.

"Let me out of here!" he whispered.

She leaned against him, shaking slowly, holding him. Her eyes showed no iris at all. "She's going to tell daddy. She's going to tell daddy to-morrow, Paul!" Between the whispers the water dripped its unhurried minor note.

"Tell what? What does she know?"

"Put your arms around me, Paul."

"Hell, no. Let go. Let's get out of here."

"Yes. You can help it. You can keep her from telling daddy."

"How help it? Damn it, let me go!"

"She will tell, but it won't matter then. Promise. Paul. Say you will."

"Marry you? Is that what you are talking about? I told you yesterday I wouldn't. Let me go, I tell you."

"All right. All right." She spoke in an eager whisper. "I believe you now. I didn't at first, but I do now. You needn't marry me, then. You can help it without marrying me." She clung to him, her hair, her body, rich with voluptuous and fainting promise. "You won't have to marry me. Will you do it?"

"Do what?"

"Listen. You remember that curve with the little white fence, where it is so far down to the bottom? Where if a car went through that little fence. . . ."

"Yes. What about it?"

"Listen. You and she will be in the car. She won't know, won't have time to suspect. And that little old fence wouldn't stop anything and they will all say it was an accident. She is old; it wouldn't take much; maybe even the shock and you are young and maybe it won't even . . . Paul! Paul!" With each word her voice seemed to faint and die, speaking with a dying cadence out of urgency and despair while he looked down at her blanched face, at her eyes filled with desperate and voluptuous promise. "Paul!"

"And where will you be all this time?" She didn't stir, her face like a sleepwalker's. "Oh. I see. You'll go home on the train. Is that it?"

"Paul!" she said in that prolonged and dying whisper. "Paul!"

In the instant of striking her his hand, as though refusing of its own volition the office, opened and touched her face in a long, shuddering motion almost a caress. Again, gripping her by the back of the neck, he assayed to strike her; again his hand, something, refused. When he flung her away she stumbled backward into the wall. Then his feet ceased and then the water began to fill the silence with its steady and unhurried sound. After a while the clock below struck two, and she moved wearily and heavily and closed the tap.

But that did not seem to stop the sound of the water. It seemed to drip on into the silence where she lay rigid on her back in bed, not sleeping, not even thinking. It dripped on while behind the frozen grimace of her aching face she got through the ritual of breakfast and of departure, the grandmother between Paul and herself in the single seat. Even the sound of the car could not drown it out, until suddenly

she realized what it was. 'It's the signboards,' she thought, watching them as they diminished in retrograde. 'I even remember that one; now it's only about two miles. I'll wait until the next one; then I will . . . now. Now.' "Paul," she said. He didn't look at her. "Will you marry me?"

"No." Neither was she looking at his face. She was watching his hands as they jockeyed the wheel slightly and constantly. Between them the grandmother sat, erect, rigid beneath the archaic black bonnet, staring straight ahead like a profile cut from parchment.

"I'm going to ask you just once more. Then it will be too late. I tell you it will be too late then, Paul . . . Paul?"

"No, I tell you. You don't love me. I don't love you. We've never said we did."

"All right. Not love, then. Will you marry me without it? Remember, it will be too late."

"No. I will not."

"But why? Why, Paul?" He didn't answer. The car fled on. Now it was the first sign which she had noticed; she thought quietly, 'We must be almost there now. It is the next curve.' She said aloud, speaking across the deafness of the old woman between them: "Why not, Paul? If it's that story about nigger blood, I don't believe it. I don't care." 'Yes,' she thought, 'this is the curve.' The road entered the curve, descending. She sat back, and then she found her grandmother looking full at her. But she did not try now to veil her face, her eyes, any more than she would have tried to conceal her voice: "Suppose I have a child?"

"Suppose you do? I can't help it now. You should have thought of that. Remember, you sent for me; I didn't ask to come back."

"No. You didn't ask. I sent for you. I made you. And this is the last time. Will you? Quick!"

"No."

"All right," she said. She sat back, at that instant the road seemed to poise and pause before plunging steeply downward beside the precipice; the white fence began to flicker past. As Elly flung the robe aside she saw her grandmother still watching her; as she lunged forward across the old woman's knees they glared eye to eye—the haggard and desperate girl and the old woman whose hearing had long since escaped everything and whose sight nothing escaped—for a profound instant of despairing ultimatum and implacable refusal. "Then die!" she cried into the old woman's face; "die!" grasping at the wheel as Paul tried to fling her back. But she managed to get her elbow into the wheel spokes with all her weight on it, sprawling across her grandmother's body, holding the wheel hard over as Paul struck her on the mouth with his fist. "Oh," she screamed, "you hit me. You *hit* me!" When the car struck the railing it flung her free, so that for an instant she lay lightly as an alighting bird upon Paul's chest, her mouth open, her eyes round with shocked surprise. "You hit me!" she wailed. Then she was falling free, alone in a complete and peaceful silence like a vacuum. Paul's face, her grandmother, the car, had disappeared, vanished as though by magic; parallel with her eyes the shattered ends of white railing, the crumbling edge of the precipice where dust whispered and a faint gout of it hung like a toy balloon, rushed mutely skyward.

Overhead somewhere a sound passed, dying away—the snore of an engine, the long hissing of tires in gravel, then the wind sighed in the trees again, shivering the crests against the sky. Against the bole of one of them the car lay in an inextricable and indistinguishable mass, and Elly sat in a litter of broken glass, staring dully at it. "Something happened," she whimpered. "He hit me. And now they are dead; it's me that's hurt, and nobody will come." She moaned a little, whimpering. Then with an air of dazed astonish-

ment she raised her hand. The palm was red and wet. She sat whimpering quietly, digging stupidly at her palm. "There's glass all in it and I can't even see it," she said, whimpered, gazing at her palm while the warm blood stained slowly down upon her skirt. Again the sound rushed steadily past high overhead, and died away. She looked up, following it. "There goes another one," she whimpered. "They won't even stop to see if I am hurt."

THE PRESIDENT STOOD motionless at the door of the Dressing Room, fully dressed save for his boots. It was half-past six in the morning and it was snowing; already he had stood for an hour at the window, watching the snow. Now he stood just inside the door to the corridor, utterly motionless in his stockings, stooped a little from his lean height as though listening, on his face an expression of humorless concern, since humor had departed from his situation and his view of it almost three weeks before. Hanging from his hand, low against his flank, was a hand mirror of elegant French design, such as should have been lying upon a lady's dressing table: certainly at this hour of a February day.

At last he put his hand on the knob and opened the door infinitesimally; beneath his hand the door crept by inches and without any sound; still with that infinitesimal silence he put his eye to the crack and saw, lying upon the deep, rich pile of the corridor carpet, a bone. It was a cooked bone, a rib; to it still adhered close shreds of flesh holding in mute and overlapping halfmoons the marks of human teeth. Now that the door was open he could hear the voices too. Still without any sound, with that infinite care, he raised and advanced the mirror. For an instant he caught his own reflection in it and he paused for a time and with a kind of cold unbelief he examined his own face—the face of the shrewd and coura-

geous fighter, of that wellnigh infallible expert in the anticipation of and controlling of man and his doings, overlaid now with the baffled helplessness of a child. Then he slanted the glass a little further until he could see the corridor reflected in it. Squatting and facing one another across the carpet as across a stream of water were two men. He did not know the faces, though he knew the Face, since he had looked upon it by day and dreamed upon it by night for three weeks now. It was a squat face, dark, a little flat, a little Mongol; secret, decorous, impenetrable, and grave. He had seen it repeated until he had given up trying to count it or even estimate it; even now, though he could see the two men squatting before him and could hear the two quiet voices, it seemed to him that in some idiotic moment out of attenuated sleeplessness and strain he looked upon a single man facing himself in a mirror.

They wore beaver hats and new frock coats; save for the minor detail of collars and waistcoats they were impeccably dressed—though a little early—for the forenoon of the time, down to the waist. But from here down credulity, all sense of fitness and decorum, was outraged. At a glance one would have said that they had come intact out of Pickwickian England, save that the tight, light-colored smallclothes ended not in Hessian boots nor in any boots at all, but in dark, naked feet. On the floor beside each one lay a neatly rolled bundle of dark cloth; beside each bundle in turn, mute toe and toe and heel and heel, as though occupied by invisible sentries facing one another across the corridor, sat two pairs of new boots. From a basket woven of whiteoak withes beside one of the squatting men there shot suddenly the snake-like head and neck of a game cock, which glared at the faint flash of the mirror with a round, yellow, outraged eye. It was from these that the voices came, pleasant, decorous, quiet:

"That rooster hasn't done you much good up here."

"That's true. Still, who knows? Besides, I certainly couldn't have left him at home, with those damned lazy Indians. I wouldn't find a feather left. You know that. But it is a nuisance, having to lug this cage around with me day and night."

"This whole business is a nuisance, if you ask me."

"You said it. Squatting here outside this door all night long, without a gun or anything. Suppose bad men tried to get in during the night: what could we do? If anyone would want to get in. I don't."

"Nobody does. It's for honor."

"Whose honor? Yours? Mine? Frank Weddel's?"

"White man's honor. You don't understand white people. They are like children: you have to handle them careful because you never know what they are going to do next. So if it's the rule for guests to squat all night long in the cold outside this man's door, we'll just have to do it. Besides, hadn't you rather be in here than out yonder in the snow in one of those damn tents?"

"You said it. What a climate. What a country. I wouldn't have this town if they gave it to me."

"Of course you wouldn't. But that's white men: no accounting for taste. So as long as we are here, we'll have to try to act like these people believe that Indians ought to act. Because you never know until afterward just what you have done to insult or scare them. Like this having to talk white talk all the time. . . ."

The President withdrew the mirror and closed the door quietly. Once more he stood silent and motionless in the middle of the room, his head bent, musing, baffled yet indomitable: indomitable since this was not the first time that he had faced odds; baffled since he faced not an enemy in the open field, but was besieged within his very high and lonely office by them to whom he was, by legal if not divine appointment, father. In the iron silence of the winter dawn he

seemed, clairvoyant of walls, to be ubiquitous and one with the waking of the stately House. Invisible and in a kind of musing horror he seemed to be of each group of his Southern guests—that one squatting without the door, that larger one like so many figures carved of stone in the very rotunda itself of this concrete and visible apotheosis of the youthful Nation's pride—in their new beaver's and frock coats and woolen drawers. With their neatly rolled pantaloons under their arms and their virgin shoes in the other hand; dark, timeless, decorous and serene beneath the astonished faces and golden braid, the swords and ribbons and stars, of European diplomats.

The President said quietly, "Damn. Damn. Damn." He moved and crossed the room, pausing to take up his boots from where they sat beside a chair, and approached the opposite door. Again he paused and opened this door too quietly and carefully, out of the three weeks' habit of expectant fatalism, though there was only his wife beyond it, sleeping peacefully in bed. He crossed this room in turn, carrying his boots, pausing to replace the hand glass on the dressing table, among its companion pieces of the set which the new French Republic had presented to a predecessor, and tiptoed on and into the anteroom, where a man in a long cloak looked up and then rose, also in his stockings. They looked at one another soberly. "All clear?" the President said in a low tone.

"Yes, General."

"Good. Did you . . ." The other produced a second long, plain cloak. "Good, good," the President said. He swung the cloak about him before the other could move. "Now the . . ." This time the other anticipated him; the President drew the hat well down over his face. They left the room on tiptoe, carrying their boots in their hands.

The back stairway was cold; their stockinged toes curled

away from the treads, their vaporized breath wisped about their heads. They descended quietly and sat on the bottom step and put on their boots.

Outside it still snowed; invisible against snow-colored sky and snow-colored earth, the flakes seemed to materialize with violent and silent abruptness against the dark orifice of the stables. Each bush and shrub resembled a white balloon whose dark shroud lines descended, light and immobile, to the white earth. Interspersed among these in turn and with a certain regularity were a dozen vaguely tent-shaped mounds, from the ridge of each of which a small column of smoke rose into the windless snow, as if the snow itself were in a state of peaceful combustion. The President looked at these, once, grimly. "Get along," he said. The other, his head lowered and his cloak held closely about his face, scuttled on and ducked into the stable. Perish the day when these two words were applied to the soldier chief of a party and a nation, yet the President was so close behind him that their breaths made one cloud. And perish the day when the word *flight* were so applied, yet they had hardly vanished into the stable when they emerged, mounted now and already at a canter, and so across the lawn and past the snow-hidden tents and toward the gates which gave upon that Avenue in embryo yet but which in time would be the stage upon which each four years would parade the proud panoply of the young Nation's lusty man's estate for the admiration and envy and astonishment of the weary world. At the moment, though, the gates were occupied by those more immediate than splendid augurs of the future.

"Look out," the other man said, reining back. They reined aside—the President drew the cloak about his face—and allowed the party to enter: the squat, broad, dark men dark against the snow, the beaver hats, the formal coats, the solid legs clad from thigh to ankle in woolen drawers. Among

them moved three horses on whose backs were lashed the carcasses of six deer. They passed on, passing the two horsemen without a glance.

"Damn, damn, damn," the President said; then aloud: "You found good hunting."

One of the group glanced at him, briefly. He said courteously, pleasantly, without inflection, going on: "So so."

The horses moved again. "I didn't see any guns," the other man said.

"Yes," the President said grimly. "I must look into this, too. I gave strict orders. . . ." He said fretfully, "Damn. Damn. Do they carry their pantaloons when they go hunting too, do you know?"

The Secretary was at breakfast, though he was not eating. Surrounded by untasted dishes he sat, in his dressing gown and unshaven; his expression too was harried as he perused the paper which lay upon his empty plate. Before the fire were two men—one a horseman with unmelted snow still upon his cloak, seated on a wooden settle, the other standing, obviously the secretary to the Secretary. The horseman rose as the President and his companion entered. "Sit down, sit down," the President said. He approached the table, slipping off the cloak, which the secretary came forward and took. "Give us some breakfast," the President said. "We don't dare go home." He sat down; the Secretary served him in person. "What is it now?" the President said.

"Do you ask?" the Secretary said. He took up the paper again and glared at it. "From Pennsylvania, this time." He struck the paper. "Maryland, New York, and now Pennsylvania; apparently the only thing that can stop them is the temperature of the water in the Potomac River." He spoke in a harsh, irascible voice. "Complaint, complaint, complaint: here is a farmer near Gettysburg. His Negro slave was in the

barn, milking by lantern light after dark, when—the Negro doubtless thought about two hundred, since the farmer estimated them at ten or twelve—springing suddenly out of the darkness in plug hats and carrying knives and naked from the waist down. Result, item: One barn and loft of hay and cow destroyed when the lantern was kicked over; item: one able-bodied slave last seen departing from the scene at a high rate of speed, headed for the forest, and doubtless now dead of fear or by the agency of wild beasts. Debit the Government of the United States: for barn and hay, one hundred dollars; for cow, fifteen dollars; for Negro slave, two hundred dollars. He demands it in gold."

"Is that so?" the President said, eating swiftly. "I suppose the Negro and the cow took them to be ghosts of Hessian soldiers."

"I wonder if they thought the cow was a deer," the horseman said.

"Yes," the President said. "That's something else I want. . . ."

"Who wouldn't take them for anything on earth or under it?" the Secretary said. "The entire Atlantic seaboard north of the Potomac River overrun by creatures in beaver hats and frock coats and woolen drawers, frightening women and children, setting fire to barns and running off slaves, killing deer. . . ."

"Yes," the President said. "I want to say a word about that, myself. I met a party of them returning as I came out. They had six deer. I thought I gave strict orders that they were not to be permitted guns."

Again it was the horseman who spoke. "They don't use guns."

"What?" the President said. "But I saw myself. . . ."

"No, sir. They use knives. They track the deer down and slip up on them and cut their throats."

"What?" the President said.

"All right, sir. I seen one of the deer. It never had a mark on it except its throat cut up to the neckbone with one lick."

Again the President said, "Damn. Damn. Damn." Then the President ceased and the Soldier cursed steadily for a while. The others listened, gravely, their faces carefully averted, save the Secretary, who had taken up another paper. "If you could just persuade them to keep their pantaloons on," the President said. "At least about the House. . . ."

The Secretary started back, his hair upcrested like an outraged, iron-gray cockatoo. "I, sir? I persuade them?"

"Why not? Aren't they subject to your Department? I'm just the President. Confound it, it's got to where my wife no longer dares leave her bedroom, let alone receive lady guests. How am I to explain to the French Ambassador, for instance, why his wife no longer dares call upon my wife because the corridors and the very entrance to the House are blocked by half-naked Chickasaw Indians asleep on the floor or gnawing at half-raw ribs of meat? And I, myself, having to hide away from my own table and beg breakfast, while the official representative of the Government has nothing to do but . . ."

". . . but explain again each morning to the Treasury," the Secretary said in shrill rage, "why another Dutch farmer in Pennsylvania or New York must have three hundred dollars in gold in payment for the destruction of his farm and livestock, and explain to the State Department that the capital is not being besieged by demons from hell itself, and explain to the War Department why twelve brand-new army tents must be ventilated at the top with butcher knives. . . ."

"I noticed that, too," the President said mildly. "I had forgot it."

"Ha. Your Excellency noted it," the Secretary said fiercely. "Your Excellency saw it and then forgot it. I have neither seen it nor been permitted to forget it. And now

Your Excellency wonders why I do not persuade them to wear their pantaloons."

"It does seem like they would," the President said fretfully. "The other garments seem to please them well enough. But there's no accounting for taste." He ate again. The Secretary looked at him, about to speak. Then he did not. As he watched the oblivious President a curious, secret expression came into his face; his gray and irate crest settled slowly, as if it were deflating itself. When he spoke now his tone was bland, smooth; now the other three men were watching the President with curious, covert expressions.

"Yes," the Secretary said, "there's no accounting for taste. Though it does seem that when one has been presented with a costume as a mark of both honor and esteem, let alone decorum, and by the chief of a well, tribe . . ."

"That's what I thought," the President said innocently. Then he ceased chewing and said "Eh?" sharply, looking up. The three lesser men looked quickly away, but the Secretary continued to watch the President with that bland, secret expression. "What the devil do you mean?" the President said. He knew what the Secretary meant, just as the other three knew. A day or two after his guest had arrived without warning, and after the original shock had somewhat abated, the President had decreed the new clothing for them. He commanded, out of his own pocket, merchants and hatters as he would have commanded gunsmiths and bulletmakers in war emergency; incidentally he was thus able to estimate the number of them, the men at least, and within forty-eight hours he had transformed his guest's grave and motley train into the outward aspect of decorum at least. Then, two mornings after that, the guest—the half Chickasaw, half Frenchman, the squat, obese man with the face of a Gascon brigand and the mannerisms of a spoiled eunuch and dingy lace at throat and wrist, who for three weeks now had dogged his

waking hours and his sleeping dreams with bland inescapability—called formally upon him while he and his wife were still in bed at five o'clock in the morning, with two of his retainers carrying a bundle and what seemed to the President at least a hundred others, men, women and children, thronging quietly into the bedroom, apparently to watch him array himself in it. For it was a costume—even in the shocked horror of the moment, the President found time to wonder wildly where in the capital Weddel (or Vidal) had found it—a mass, a network, of gold braid—frogs, epaulets, sash and sword—held loosely together by bright green cloth and presented to him in return. This is what the Secretary meant, while the President glared at him and while behind them both the three other men stood looking at the fire with immobile gravity. "Have your joke," the President said. "Have it quickly. Are you done laughing now?"

"I laugh?" the Secretary said. "At what?"

"Good," the President said. He thrust the dishes from him. "Then we can get down to business. Have you any documents you will need to refer to?"

The Secretary's secretary approached. "Shall I get the other papers, sir?"

"Papers?" the Secretary said; once more his crest began to rise. "What the devil do I need with papers? What else have I thought about night and day for three weeks?"

"Good; good," the President said. "Suppose you review the matter briefly, in case I have forgot anything else."

"Your Excellency is indeed a fortunate man, if you have been able to forget," the Secretary said. From the pocket of his dressing gown he took a pair of steel-bowed spectacles. But he used them merely to glare again at the President in cockatoo-crested outrage. "This man, Weddel, Vidal—whatever his name is—he and his family or clan or whatever they are—claim to own the entire part of Mississippi which lies

on the west side of this river in question. Oh, the grant is in order: that French father of his from New Orleans saw to that.—Well, it so happens that facing his home or plantation is the only ford in about three hundred miles.”

“I know all this,” the President said impatiently. “Naturally I regret now that there was any way of crossing the river at all. But otherwise I don’t see . . .”

“Neither did they,” the Secretary said. “Until the white man came.”

“Ah,” the President said. “The man who was mur . . .”

The Secretary raised his hand. “Wait. He stayed about a month with them, ostensibly hunting, since he would be absent all day long, though obviously what he was doing was assuring himself that there was no other ford close by. He never brought any game in; I imagine they laughed at that a good deal, in their pleasant way.”

“Yes,” the President said. “Weddel must have found that very amusing.”

“. . . or Vidal—whatever his name is,” the Secretary said fretfully. “He don’t even seem to know or even to care what his own name is.”

“Get on,” the President said. “About the ford.”

“Yes. Then one day, after a month, the white man offered to buy some of Weddel’s land—Weddel, Vidal—Damn, da . . .”

“Call him Weddel,” the President said.

“. . . from Weddel. Not much; a piece about the size of this room, for which Weddel or V—— charged him about ten prices. Not out of any desire for usufruct, you understand; doubtless Weddel would have given the man the land or anyway wagered it on a game of mumble peg, it not having yet occurred to any of them apparently that the small plot which the man wanted contained the only available entrance to or exit from the ford. Doubtless the trading protracted it—

self over several days or perhaps weeks, as a kind of game to while away otherwise idle afternoons or evenings, with the bystanders laughing heartily and pleasantly at the happy scene. They must have laughed a great deal, especially when the man paid Weddel's price; they must have laughed hugely indeed later when they watched the white man out in the sun, building a fence around his property, it doubtless not even then occurring to them that what the white man had done was to fence off the only entrance to the ford."

"Yes," the President said impatiently. "But I still don't see . . ."

Again the Secretary lifted his hand, pontifical, admonitory. "Neither did they; not until the first traveler came along and crossed at the ford. The white man had built himself a toll-gate."

"Oh," the President said.

"Yes. And now it must have been, indeed, amusing for them to watch the white man sitting now in the shade—he had a deerskin pouch fastened to a post for the travelers to drop their coins in, and the gate itself arranged so he could operate it by a rope from the veranda of his one-room domicile without having to even leave his seat; and to begin to acquire property—among which was the horse."

"Ah," the President said. "Now we are getting at it."

"Yes. They got at it swiftly from then on. It seems that the match was between the white man's horse and this nephew's horse, the wager the ford and tollgate against a thousand or so acres of land. The nephew's horse lost. And that night . . ."

"Ah," the President said. "I see. And that night the white man was mur . . ."

"Let us say, died," the Secretary said primly, "since it is so phrased in the agent's report. Though he did add in a private

communication that the white man's disease seemed to be a split skull. But that is neither here nor there."

"No," the President said. "It's up yonder at the House." Where they had been for three weeks now, men, women, children and Negro slaves, coming for fifteen hundred miles in slow wagons since that day in late autumn when the Chickasaw agent had appeared to inquire into the white man's death. For fifteen hundred miles, across winter swamps and rivers, across the trackless eastern backbone of the continent, led by the bland, obese mongrel despot and patriarch in a carriage, dozing, his nephew beside him and one fat, ringed hand beneath its fall of soiled lace lying upon the nephew's knee to hold him in charge. "Why didn't the agent stop him?" the President said.

"Stop him?" the Secretary cried. "He finally compromised to the extent of offering to allow the nephew to be tried on the spot, by the Indians themselves, he reserving only the intention of abolishing the tollgate, since no one knew the white man anyway. But no. The nephew must come to you, to be absolved or convicted in person."

"But couldn't the agent stop the rest of them? Keep the rest of them from . . ."

"Stop them?" the Secretary cried again. "Listen. He moved in there and lived—Weddel, Vi—Damn! damn!! Where was—Yes. Weddel told him that the house was his; soon it was. Because how could he tell there were fewer faces present each morning than the night before? Could you have? Could you now?"

"I wouldn't try," the President said. "I would just declare a national thanksgiving. So they slipped away at night."

"Yes. Weddel and the carriage and a few forage wagons went first; they had been gone about a month before the agent realized that each morning the number which remained had diminished somewhat. They would load the wagons and

go at night, by families—grandparents, parents, children; slaves, chattels and dogs—everything. And why not? Why should they deny themselves this holiday at the expense of the Government? Why should they miss, at the mere price of a fifteen-hundred-mile journey through unknown country in the dead of winter, the privilege and pleasure of spending a few weeks or months in new beavers and broadcloth coats and underdrawers, in the home of the beneficent White Father?"

"Yes," the President said. He said: "And you have told him that there is no charge here against this nephew?"

"Yes. And that if they will go back home, the agent himself will declare the nephew innocent publicly, in whatever ceremony they think fit. And he said—how was it he put it?" The Secretary now spoke in a pleasant, almost lilting tone, in almost exact imitation of the man whom he repeated: "All we desire is justice. If this foolish boy has murdered a white man, I think that we should know it."

"Damn, damn, damn," the President said. "All right. We'll hold the investigation. Get them down here and let's have it over with."

"Here?" The Secretary started back. "In my house?"

"Why not? I've had them for three weeks; at least you can have them for an hour." He turned to the companion. "Hurry. Tell them we are waiting here to hold his nephew's trial."

And now the President and the Secretary sat behind the cleared table and looked at the man who stood as though framed by the opened doors through which he had entered, holding his nephew by the hand like an uncle conducting for the first time a youthful provincial kinsman into a metropolitan museum of wax figures. Immobile, they contemplated the soft, paunchy man facing them with his soft, bland,

inscrutable face—the long, monk-like nose, the slumbrous lids, the flabby, *café-au-lait*-colored jowls above a froth of soiled lace of an elegance fifty years outmoded and vanished; the mouth was full, small, and very red. Yet somewhere behind the face's expression of flaccid and weary disillusion, as behind the bland voice and the almost feminine mannerisms, there lurked something else: something willful, shrewd, unpredictable and despotic. Behind him clotted, quiet and gravely decorous, his dark retinue in beavers and broadcloth and woolen drawers, each with his neatly rolled pantaloons beneath his arm.

For a moment longer he stood, looking from face to face until he found the President. He said, in a voice of soft reproach: "This is not your house."

"No," the President said. "This is the house of this chief whom I have appointed myself to be the holder of justice between me and my Indian people. He will deal justice to you."

The uncle bowed slightly. "That is all that we desire."

"Good," the President said. On the table before him sat inkstand, quill, and sandbox, and many papers with ribbons and golden seals much in evidence, though none could have said if the heavy gaze had remarked them or not. The President looked at the nephew. Young, lean, the nephew stood, his right wrist clasped by his uncle's fat, lace-foamed hand, and contemplated the President quietly, with grave and alert repose. The President dipped the quill into the ink. "Is this the man who . . ."

"Who performed this murder?" the uncle said pleasantly. "That is what we made this long winter's journey to discover. If he did, if this white man really did not fall from that swift horse of his perhaps and strike his head upon a sharp stone, then this nephew of mine should be punished. We do not think that it is right to slay white men like a confounded

Cherokee or Creek." Perfectly inscrutable, perfectly decorous, he looked at the two exalted personages playing behind the table their clumsy deception with dummy papers; for an instant the President himself met the slumbrous eyes and looked down. The Secretary though, upthrust, his crest roached violently upward, glared at the uncle.

"You should have held this horse-race across the ford itself," he said. "Water wouldn't have left that gash in the white man's skull."

The President, glancing quickly up, saw the heavy, secret face musing upon the Secretary with dark speculation. But almost immediately the uncle spoke. "So it would. But this white man would have doubtless required a coin of money from my nephew for passing through his gate." Then he laughed, mirthful, pleasant, decorous. "Perhaps it would have been better for that white man if he had allowed my nephew to pass through free. But that is neither here nor there now."

"No," the President said, almost sharply, so that they looked at him again. He held the quill above the paper. "What is the correct name? Weddel or Vidal?"

Again the pleasant, inflectionless voice came: "Weddel or Vidal. What does it matter by what name the White Chief calls us? We are but Indians: remembered yesterday and forgotten tomorrow."

The President wrote upon the paper. The quill scratched steadily in the silence in which there was but one other sound: a faint, steady, minor sound which seemed to emerge from the dark and motionless group behind the uncle and nephew. He sanded what he had written and folded it and rose and stood for a moment so while they watched him quietly—the soldier who had commanded men well on more occasions than this. "Your nephew is not guilty of this murder. My chief whom I have appointed to hold justice be-

tween us says for him to return home and never do this again, because next time he will be displeased."

His voice died into a shocked silence; even for that instant the heavy lids fluttered, while from the dark throng behind him that faint, unceasing sound of quiet scratching by heat and wool engendered, like a faint, constant motion of the sea, also ceased for an instant. The uncle spoke in a tone of shocked unbelief: "My nephew is free?"

"He is free," the President said. The uncle's shocked gaze traveled about the room.

"This quick? And in here? In this house? I had thought. . . . But no matter." They watched him; again the face was smooth, enigmatic, blank. "We are only Indians; doubtless these busy white men have but little time for our small affairs. Perhaps we have already incommoded them too much."

"No, no," the President said quickly. "To me, my Indian and my white people are the same." But again the uncle's gaze was traveling quietly about the room; standing side by side, the President and the Secretary could feel from one to another the same dawning alarm. After a while the President said: "Where had you expected this council to be held?"

The uncle looked at him. "You will be amused. In my ignorance I had thought that even our little affair would have been concluded in . . . But no matter."

"In what?" the President said.

The bland, heavy face mused again upon him for a moment. "You will laugh; nevertheless, I will obey you. In the big white council house beneath the golden eagle."

"What?" the Secretary cried, starting again. "In the . . ."

The uncle looked away. "I said that you would be amused. But no matter. We will have to wait, anyway."

"Have to wait?" the President said. "For what?"

"This is really amusing," the uncle said. He laughed again, in his tone of joyful detachment. "More of my people are

about to arrive. We can wait for them, since they will wish to see and hear also." No one exclaimed at all now, not even the Secretary. They merely stared at him while the bland voice went on: "It seems that some of them mistook the town. They had heard the name of the White Chief's capital spoken, but it so happens that there is also a town in our country with the same name, so that when some of the People inquired on the road, they became misdirected and went there instead, poor ignorant Indians." He laughed, with fond and mirthful tolerance behind his enigmatic and sleepy face. "But a messenger has arrived; they will arrive themselves within the week. Then we will see about punishing this head-strong boy." He shook the nephew's arm lightly. Except for this the nephew did not move, watching the President with his grave and unwinking regard.

For a long moment there was no sound save the faint, steady scratching of the Indians. Then the Secretary began to speak, patiently, as though addressing a child: "Look. Your nephew is free. This paper says that he did not slay the white man and that no man shall so accuse him again, else both I and the great chief beside me will be angered. He can return home now, at once. Let all of you return home at once. For is it not well said that the graves of a man's fathers are never quiet in his absence?"

Again there was silence. Then the President said, "Besides, the white council house beneath the golden eagle is being used now by a council of chiefs who are more powerful there than I am."

The uncle's hand lifted; foamed with soiled lace, his forefinger wagged in reproachful deprecation. "Do not ask even an ignorant Indian to believe that," he said. Then he said, with no change of inflection whatever; the Secretary did not know until the President told him later, that the uncle was now addressing him: "And these chiefs will doubtless be oc-

cupying the white council hut for some time yet, I suppose."

"Yes," the Secretary said. "Until the last snow of winter has melted among the flowers and the green grass."

"Good," the uncle said. "We will wait, then. Then the rest of the People will have time to arrive."

And so it was that up that Avenue with a high destiny the cavalcade moved in the still falling snow, led by the carriage containing the President and the uncle and nephew, the fat, ringed hand lying again upon the nephew's knee, and followed by a second carriage containing the Secretary and his secretary, and this followed in turn by two files of soldiers between which walked the dark and decorous cloud of men, women and children on foot and in arms; so it was that behind the Speaker's desk of that chamber which was to womb and contemplate the high dream of a destiny superior to the injustice of events and the folly of mankind, the President and the Secretary stood, while below them, ringed about by the living manipulators of, and interspersed by the august and watching ghosts of the dreamers of, the destiny, the uncle and nephew stood, with behind them the dark throng of kin and friends and acquaintances from among which came steadily and unabated that faint sound of wool and flesh in friction. The President leaned to the Secretary.

"Are they ready with the cannon?" he whispered. "Are you sure they can see my arm from the door? And suppose those damned guns explode: they have not been fired since Washington shot them last at Cornwallis: will they impeach me?"

"Yes," the Secretary hissed.

"Then God help us. Give me the book." The Secretary passed it to him: it was Petrarch's Sonnets, which the Secretary had snatched from his table in passing. "Let us hope that I remember enough law Latin to keep it from sounding like either English or Chickasaw," the President said. He opened

the book, and then again the President, the conqueror of men, the winner of battles diplomatic, legal and martial, drew himself erect and looked down upon the dark, still, intent, waiting faces; when he spoke his voice was the voice which before this had caused men to pause and attend and then obey: "Francis Weddel, chief in the Chickasaw Nation, and you, nephew of Francis Weddel and some day to be a chief, hear my words." Then he began to read. His voice was full, sonorous, above the dark faces, echoing about the august dome in profound and solemn syllables. He read ten sonnets. Then, with his arm lifted, he perorated; his voice died profoundly away and he dropped his arm. A moment later, from outside the building, came a ragged crash of artillery. And now for the first time the dark throng stirred; from among them came a sound, a murmur, of pleased astonishment. The President spoke again: "Nephew of Francis Weddel, you are free. Return to your home."

And now the uncle spoke; again his finger waggled from out its froth of lace. "Heedless boy," he said. "Consider the trouble which you have caused these busy men." He turned to the Secretary, almost briskly; again his voice was bland, pleasant, almost mirthful: "And now, about the little matter of this cursed ~~ford~~ . . ."

With the autumn sun falling warmly and pleasantly across his shoulders, the President said, "That is all," quietly and turned to his desk as the secretary departed. While he took up the letter and opened it the sun fell upon his hands and upon the page, with its inference of the splendid dying of the year, of approaching harvests and of columns of quiet wood smoke—serene pennons of peace—above peaceful chimneys about the land.

Suddenly the President started; he sprang up, the letter in his hand, glaring at it in shocked and alarmed consternation

while the bland words seemed to explode one by one in his comprehension like musketry:

Dear sir and friend:

This is really amusing. Again this hot-headed nephew—he must have taken his character from his father's people, since it is none of mine—has come to trouble you and me. It is this cursed ford again. Another white man came among us, to hunt in peace we thought, since God's forest and the deer which He put in it belong to all. But he too became obsessed with the idea of owning this ford, having heard tales of his own kind who, after the curious and restless fashion of white men, find one side of a stream of water superior enough to the other to pay coins of money for the privilege of reaching it. So the affair was arranged as this white man desired it. Perhaps I did wrong, you will say. But—do I need to tell you?—I am a simple man and some day I shall be old, I trust, and the continuous interruption of these white men who wish to cross and the collecting and care of the coins of money is only a nuisance. For what can money be to me, whose destiny it apparently is to spend my declining years beneath the shade of familiar trees from whose peaceful shade my great white friend and chief has removed the face of every enemy save death? That was my thought, but when you read further you will see that it was not to be.

Once more it is this rash and heedless boy. It seems that he challenged this new white man of ours (or the white man challenged him: the truth I will leave to your unerring wisdom to unravel) to a swimming race in the river, the stakes to be this cursed ford against a few miles of land, which (this will amuse you) this wild nephew of mine did not even own. The race took place, but unfortunately our white man failed to emerge from the river until after he was dead. And now your agent has arrived, and he seems to feel that perhaps

this swimming race should not have taken place at all. And so now there is nothing for me to do save to bestir old bones and bring this rash boy to you for you to reprimand him. We will arrive in about . . .

The President sprang to the bell and pulled it violently. When his secretary entered, he grasped the man by the shoulders and whirled him toward the door again. "Get me the Secretary of War, and maps of all the country between here and New Orleans!" he cried. "Hurry."

And so again we see him; the President is absent now and it is the Soldier alone who sits with the Secretary of War behind the map-strewn table, while there face them the officers of a regiment of cavalry. At the table his secretary is writing furiously while the President looks over his shoulder. "Write it big," he says, "so that even an Indian cannot mistake it. *Know all men by these presents,*" he quotes. "*Francis Weddel his heirs, descendants and assigns from now on in perpetuity . . . provided—Have you got provided? Good—provided that neither he nor his do ever again cross to the eastern side of the above described River. . . . And now to that damned agent,*" he said. "The sign must be in duplicate, at both ends of the ford: *The United States accepts no responsibility for any man, woman or child, black, white, yellow or red, who crosses this ford, and no white man shall buy, lease or accept it as a gift save under the severest penalty of the law. Can I do that?*"

"I'm afraid not, Your Excellency," the Secretary said.

The President mused swiftly. "Damn," he said. "Strike out *The United States*, then." The Secretary did so. The President folded the two papers and handed them to the cavalry colonel. "Ride," he said. "Your orders are, Stop them."

"Suppose they refuse to stop," the colonel said. "Shall I fire then?"

"Yes," the President said. "Shoot every horse, mule, and ox. I know they won't walk. Off with you, now." The officers withdrew. The President turned back to the maps—the Soldier still: eager, happy, as though he rode himself with the regiment, or as if in spirit already he deployed it with that shrewd cunning which could discern and choose the place most disadvantageous to the enemy, and get there first. "It will be here," he said. He put his finger on the map. "A horse, General, that I may meet him here and turn his flank and drive him."

"Done, General," the Secretary said.

Turnabout

THE AMERICAN—the older one—wore no pink Bedfords. His breeches were of plain whipcord, like the tunic. And the tunic had no long London-cut skirts, so that below the Sam Browne the tail of it stuck straight out like the tunic of a military policeman beneath his holster belt. And he wore simple puttees and the easy shoes of a man of middle age, instead of Savile Row boots, and the shoes and the puttees did not match in shade, and the ordnance belt did not match either of them, and the pilot's wings on his breast were just wings. But the ribbon beneath them was a good ribbon, and the insigne on his shoulders were the twin bars of a captain. He was not tall. His face was thin, a little aquiline; the eyes intelligent and a little tired. He was past twenty-five; looking at him, one thought, not Phi Beta Kappa exactly, but Skull and Bones perhaps, or possibly a Rhodes scholarship.

One of the men who faced him, probably could not see him at all. He was being held on his feet by an American military policeman. He was quite drunk, and in contrast with the heavy-jawed policeman who held him erect on his long, slim, boneless legs, he looked like a masquerading girl. He was possibly eighteen, tall, with a pink-and-white face and blue eyes, and a mouth like a girl's mouth. He wore a pea-coat, buttoned awry and stained with recent mud, and upon his blond head, at that unmistakable and rakish swagger

which no other people can ever approach or imitate, the cap of a Royal Naval Officer.

"What's this, corporal?" the American captain said. "What's the trouble? He's an Englishman. You'd better let their M. P.'s take care of him."

"I know he is," the policeman said. He spoke heavily, breathing heavily, in the voice of a man under physical strain; for all his girlish delicacy of limb, the English boy was heavier—or more helpless—than he looked. "Stand up!" the policeman said. "They're officers!"

The English boy made an effort then. He pulled himself together, focusing his eyes. He swayed, throwing his arms about the policeman's neck, and with the other hand he saluted, his hand flicking, fingers curled a little, to his right ear, already swaying again and catching himself again. "Cheer-o, sir," he said. "Name's not Beatty, I hope."

"No," the captain said.

"Ah," the English boy said. "I hoped not. My mistake. No offense, what?"

"No offense," the captain said quietly. But he was looking at the policeman. The second American spoke. He was a lieutenant, also a pilot. But he was not twenty-five and he wore the pink breeches, the London boots, and his tunic might have been a British tunic save for the collar.

"It's one of those navy eggs," he said. "They pick them out of the gutters here all night long. You don't come to town often enough."

"Oh," the captain said. "I've heard about them. I remember now." He also remarked now that, though the street was a busy one—it was just outside a popular café—and there were many passers, soldier, civilian, women, yet none of them so much as paused, as though it were a familiar sight. He was looking at the policeman. "Can't you take him to his ship?"

"I thought of that before the captain did," the policeman said. "He says he can't go aboard his ship after dark because he puts the ship away at sundown."

"Puts it away?"

"Stand up, sailor!" the policeman said savagely, jerking at his lax burden. "Maybe the captain can make sense out of it. Damned if I can. He says they keep the boat under the wharf. Run it under the wharf at night, and that they can't get it out again until the tide goes out tomorrow."

"Under the wharf? A boat? What is this?" He was now speaking to the lieutenant. "Do they operate some kind of aquatic motorcycles?"

"Something like that," the lieutenant said. "You've seen them—the boats. Launches, camouflaged and all. Dashing up and down the harbor. You've seen them. They do that all day and sleep in the gutters here all night."

"Oh," the captain said. "I thought those boats were ship commanders' launches. You mean to tell me they use officers just to—"

"I don't know," the lieutenant said. "Maybe they use them to fetch hot water from one ship to another. Or buns. Or maybe to go back and forth fast when they forget napkins or something."

"Nonsense," the captain said. He looked at the English boy again.

"That's what they do," the lieutenant said. "Town's lousy with them all night long. Gutters full, and their M. P.'s carting them away in batches, like nursemaids in a park. Maybe the French give them the launches to get them out of the gutters during the day."

"Oh," the captain said, "I see." But it was clear that he didn't see, wasn't listening, didn't believe what he did hear. He looked at the English boy. "Well, you can't leave him here in that shape," he said.

Again the English boy tried to pull himself together. "Quite all right, 'sure you," he said glassily, his voice pleasant, cheerful almost, quite courteous. "Used to it. Confounded rough *pavé*, though. Should force French do something about it. Visiting lads jolly well deserve decent field to play on, what?"

"And he was jolly well using all of it too," the policeman said savagely. "He must think he's a one-man team, maybe."

At that moment a fifth man came up. He was a British military policeman. "Nah then," he said. "What's this? What's this?" Then he saw the Americans' shoulder bars. He saluted. At the sound of his voice the English boy turned, swaying, peering.

"Oh, hullo, Albert," he said.

"Nah then, Mr. Hope," the British policeman said. He said to the American policeman, over his shoulder: "What is it this time?"

"Likely nothing," the American said. "The way you guys run a war. But I'm a stranger here. Here. Take him."

"What is this, corporal?" the captain said. "What was he doing?"

"He won't call it nothing," the American policeman said, jerking his head at the British policeman. "He'll just call it a thrush or a robin or something. I turn into this street about three blocks back a while ago, and I find it blocked with a line of trucks going up from the docks, and the drivers all hollering ahead what the hell the trouble is. So I come on, and I find it is about three blocks of them, blocking the cross streets too; and I come on to the head of it where the trouble is, and I find about a dozen of the drivers out in front, holding a caucus or something in the middle of the street, and I come up and I say, 'What's going on here?' and they leave me through and I find this egg here laying—"

"Yer talking about one of His Majesty's officers, my man," the British policeman said.

"Watch yourself, corporal," the captain said. "And you found this officer—"

"He had done gone to bed in the middle of the street, with an empty basket for a pillow. Laying there with his hands under his head and his knees crossed, arguing with them about whether he ought to get up and move or not. He said that the trucks could turn back and go around by another street, but that he couldn't use any other street, because this street was his."

"His street?"

The English boy had listened, interested, pleasant. "Billet, you see," he said. "Must have order, even in war emergency. Billet by lot. This street mine; no poaching, eh? Next street Jamie Wutherspoon's. But trucks can go by that street because Jamie not using it yet. Not in bed yet. Insomnia. Knew so. Told them. Trucks go that way. See now?"

"Was that it, corporal?" the captain said.

"He told you. He wouldn't get up. He just laid there, arguing with them. He was telling one of them to go somewhere and bring back a copy of their articles of war—"

"King's Regulations; yes," the captain said.

"—and see if the book said whether he had the right of way, or the trucks. And then I got him up, and then the captain come along. And that's all. And with the captain's permission I'll now hand him over to His Majesty's wet nur—"

"That'll do, corporal," the captain said. "You can go. I'll see to this." The policeman saluted and went on. The British policeman was now supporting the English boy. "Can't you take him?" the captain said. "Where are their quarters?"

"I don't rightly know, sir, if they have quarters or not.

We—I usually see them about the pubs until daylight. They don't seem to use quarters."

"You mean, they really aren't off of ships?"

"Well, sir, they might be ships, in a manner of speaking. But a man would have to be a bit sleepier than him to sleep in one of them."

"I see," the captain said. He looked at the policeman. "What kind of boats are they?"

This time the policeman's voice was immediate, final and completely inflectionless. It was like a closed door. "I don't rightly know, sir."

"Oh," the captain said. "Quite. Well, he's in no shape to stay about pubs until daylight this time."

"Perhaps I can find him a bit of a pub with a back table, where he can sleep," the policeman said. But the captain was not listening. He was looking across the street, where the lights of another café fell across the pavement. The English boy yawned terrifically, like a child does, his mouth pink and frankly gaped as a child's.

The captain turned to the policeman:

"Would you mind stepping across there and asking for Captain Bogard's driver? I'll take care of Mr. Hope."

The policeman departed. The captain now supported the English boy, his hand beneath the other's arm. Again the boy yawned like a weary child. "Steady," the captain said. "The car will be here in a minute."

"Right," the English boy said through the yawn.

II

ONCE IN THE CAR, he went to sleep immediately with the peaceful suddenness of babies, sitting between the two Americans. But though the aerodrome was only thirty minutes away, he was awake when they arrived, apparently quite

fresh, and asking for whisky. When they entered the mess he appeared quite sober, only blinking a little in the lighted room, in his raked cap and his awry-buttoned pea-jacket and a soiled silk muffler, embroidered with a club insignia which Bogard recognized to have come from a famous preparatory school, twisted about his throat.

"Ah," he said, his voice fresh, clear now, not blurred, quite cheerful, quite loud, so that the others in the room turned and looked at him. "Jolly. Whisky, what?" He went straight as a bird dog to the bar in the corner, the lieutenant following. Bogard had turned and gone on to the other end of the room, where five men sat about a card table.

"What's he admiral of?" one said.

"Of the whole Scotch navy, when I found him," Bogard said.

Another looked up. "Oh, I thought I'd seen him in town." He looked at the guest. "Maybe it's because he was on his feet that I didn't recognize him when he came in. You usually see them lying down in the gutter."

"Oh," the first said. He, too, looked around. "Is he one of those guys?"

"Sure. You've seen them. Sitting on the curb, you know, with a couple of limey M. P.'s hauling at their arms."

"Yes. I've seen them," the other said. They all looked at the English boy. He stood at the bar, talking, his voice loud, cheerful. "They all look like him too," the speaker said. "About seventeen or eighteen. They run those little boats that are always dashing in and out."

"Is that what they do?" a third said. "You mean, there's a male marine auxiliary to the Waacs? Good Lord, I sure made a mistake when I enlisted. But this war never was advertised right."

"I don't know," Bogard said. "I guess they do more than just ride around."

But they were not listening to him. They were looking at the guest. "They run by clock," the first said. "You can see the condition of one of them after sunset and almost tell what time it is. But what I don't see is, how a man that's in that shape at one o'clock every morning can even see a battleship the next day."

"Maybe when they have a message to send out to a ship," another said, "they just make duplicates and line the launches up and point them toward the ship and give each one a duplicate of the message and let them go. And the ones that miss the ship just cruise around the harbor until they hit a dock somewhere."

"It must be more than that," Bogard said.

He was about to say something else, but at that moment the guest turned from the bar and approached, carrying a glass. He walked steadily enough, but his color was high and his eyes were bright, and he was talking, loud, cheerful, as he came up.

"I say. Won't you chaps join—" He ceased. He seemed to remark something; he was looking at their breasts. "Oh, I say. You fly. All of you. Oh, good gad! Find it jolly, eh?"

"Yes," somebody said. "Jolly."

"But dangerous, what?"

"A little faster than tennis," another said. The guest looked at him, bright, affable, intent.

Another said quickly, "Bogard says you command a vessel."

"Hardly a vessel. Thanks, though. And not command. Ronnie does that. Ranks me a bit. Age."

"Ronnie?"

"Yes. Nice. Good egg. Old, though. Stickler."

"Stickler?"

"Frightful. You'd not believe it. Whenever we sight smoke and I have the glass, he sheers away. Keeps the ship

hull down all the while. No beaver then. Had me two down a fortnight yesterday."

The Americans glanced at one another. "No beaver?"

"We play it. With basket masts, you see. See a basket mast. Beaver! One up. The Ergenstrass: doesn't count any more, though."

The men about the table looked at one another. Bogard spoke. "I see. When you or Ronnie see a ship with basket masts, you get a beaver on the other. I see. What is the Ergenstrasse?"

"She's German. Interned. Tramp steamer. Foremast rigged so it looks something like a basket mast. Booms, cables, I dare say. I didn't think it looked very much like a basket mast, myself. But Ronnie said yes. Called it one day. Then one day they shifted her across the basin and I called her on Ronnie. So we decided to not count her any more. See now, eh?"

"Oh," the one who had made the tennis remark said, "I see. You and Ronnie run about in the launch, playing beaver. H'm'm. That's nice. Did you ever pl—"

"Jerry," Bogard said. The guest had not moved. He looked down at the speaker, still smiling, his eyes quite wide.

The speaker still looked at the guest. "Has yours and Ronnie's boat got a yellow stern?"

"A yellow stern?" the English boy said. He had quit smiling, but his face was still pleasant.

"I thought that maybe when the boats had two captains, they might paint the sterns yellow or something."

"Oh," the guest said. "Burt and Reeves aren't officers."

"Burt and Reeves," the other said, in a musing tone. "So they go, too. Do they play beaver too?"

"Jerry," Bogard said. The other looked at him. Bogard jerked his head a little. "Come over here." The other rose. They went aside, "Lay off of him," Bogard said. "I mean it,

now. He's just a kid. When you were that age, how much sense did you have? Just about enough to get to chapel on time."

"My country hadn't been at war going on four years, though," Jerry said. "Here we are, spending our money and getting shot at by the clock, and it's not even our fight, and these limeys that would have beer^e goose-stepping twelve months now if it hadn't been—"

"Shut it," Bogard said. "You sound like a Liberty Loan."

"—taking it like it was a fair or something. 'Jolly.'" His voice was now falsetto, lilting. "But dangerous, what?"

"Sh-h-h-h," Bogard said.

"I'd like to catch him and his Ronnie out in the harbor, just once. Any harbor. London's. I wouldn't want anything but a Jenny, either. Jenny? Hell, I'd take a bicycle and a pair of water wings! I'll show him some war."

"Well, you lay off him now. He'll be gone soon."

"What are you going to do with him?"

"I'm going to take him along this morning. Let him have Harper's place out front. He says he can handle a Lewis. Says they have one on the boat. Something he was telling me—about how he once shot out a channel-marker light at seven hundred yards."

"Well, that's your business. Maybe he can beat you."

"Beat me?"

"Playing beaver. And then you can take on Ronnie."

"I'll show him some war, anyway," Bogard said. He looked at the guest. "His people have been in it three years now, and he seems to take it like a sophomore in town for the big game." He looked at Jerry again. "But you lay off him now."

As they approached the table, the guest's voice was loud and cheerful: "... if he got the glasses first, he would go in close and look, but when I got them first, he'd sheer off where I couldn't see anything but the smoke. Frightful

stickler. Frightful. But Ergenstrasse not counting any more. And if you make a mistake and call her, you lose two beaver from your score. If Ronnie were only to forget and call her we'd be even."

III

AT TWO O'CLOCK the English boy was still talking, his voice bright, innocent and cheerful. He was telling them how Switzerland had been spoiled by 1914, and instead of the vacation which his father had promised him for his sixteenth birthday, when that birthday came he and his tutor had had to do with Wales. But that he and the tutor had got pretty nigh and that he dared to say—with all due respect to any present who might have had the advantage of Switzerland, of course—that one could see probably as far from Wales as from Switzerland. "Perspire as much and breathe as hard, anyway," he added. And about him the Americans sat, a little hard-bitten, a little sober, somewhat older, listening to him with a kind of cold astonishment. They had been getting up for some time now and going out and returning in flying clothes, carrying helmets and goggles. An orderly entered with a tray of coffee cups, and the guest realized that for some time now he had been hearing engines in the darkness outside.

At last Bogard rose. "Come along," he said. "We'll get your togs." When they emerged from the mess, the sound of the engines was quite loud—an idling thunder. In alignment along the invisible tarmac was a vague rank of short banks of flickering blue-green fire suspended apparently in mid-air. They crossed the aerodrome to Bogard's quarters, where the lieutenant, McGinnis, sat on a cot fastening his flying boots. Bogard reached down a Sidcott suit and threw it across the cot. "Put this on," he said.

"Will I need all this?" the guest said. "Shall we be gone that long?"

"Probably," Bogard said. "Better use it. Cold upstairs."

The guest picked up the suit. "I say," he said. "I say, Ronnie and I have a do ourselves, tomor—today. Do you think Ronnie won't mind if I am a bit late? Might not wait for me."

"We'll be back before teatime," McGinnis said. He seemed quite busy with his boot. "Promise you." The English boy looked at him.

"What time should you be back?" Bogard said.

"Oh, well," the English boy said, "I dare say it will be all right. They let Ronnie say when to go, anyway. He'll wait for me if I should be a bit late."

"He'll wait," Bogard said. "Get your suit on."

"Right," the other said. They helped him into the suit. "Never been up before," he said, chattily, pleasantly. "Dare say you can see farther than from mountains, eh?"

"See more, anyway," McGinnis said. "You'll like it."

"Oh, rather. If Ronnie only waits for me. Lark. But dangerous, isn't it?"

"Go on," McGinnis said. "You're kidding me."

"Shut your trap, Mac," Bogard said. "Come along. Want some more coffee?" He looked at the guest, but McGinnis answered:

"No. Got something better than coffee. Coffee makes such a confounded stain on the wings."

"On the wings?" the English boy said. "Why coffee on the wings?"

"Stow it, I said, Mac," Bogard said. "Come along."

They recrossed the aerodrome, approaching the muttering banks of flame. When they drew near, the guest began to discern the shape, the outlines, of the Handley-Page. It looked like a Pullman coach run upslanted aground into the

skeleton of the first floor of an incomplete skyscraper. The guest looked at it quietly.

"It's larger than a cruiser," he said in his bright, interested voice. "I say, you know. This doesn't fly in one lump. You can't pull my leg. Seen them before. It comes in two parts: Captain Bogard and me in one; Mac and 'nother chap in other. What?"

"No," McGinnis said. Bogard had vanished. "It all goes up in one lump. Big lark, eh? Buzzard, what?"

"Buzzard?" the guest murmured. "Oh, I say. A cruiser. Flying. I say, now."

"And listen," McGinnis said. His hand came forth; something cold fumbled against the hand of the English boy—a bottle. "When you feel yourself getting sick, see? Take a pull at it."

"Oh, shall I get sick?"

"Sure. We all do. Part of flying. This will stop it. But if it doesn't. See?"

"What? Quite. What?"

"Not overside. Don't spew it overside."

"Not overside?"

"It'll blow back in Bogy's and my face. Can't see. Bingo. Finished. See?"

"Oh, quite. What shall I do with it?" Their voices were quiet, brief, grave as conspirators.

"Just duck your head and let ner go."

"Oh, quite."

Bogard returned. "Show him how to get into the front pit, will you?" he said. McGinnis led the way through the trap. Forward, rising to the slant of the fuselage, the passage narrowed; a man would need to crawl.

"Crawl in there and keep going," McGinnis said.

"It looks like a dog kennel," the guest said.

"Doesn't it, though?" McGinnis agreed cheerfully. "Cut

along with you." Stooping, he could hear the other scuttling forward. "You'll find a Lewis gun up there, like as not," he said into the tunnel.

The voice of the guest came back: "Found it."

"The gunnety sergeant will be along in a minute and show you if it is loaded."

"It's loaded," the guest said; almost on the heels of his words the gun fired, a brief staccato burst. There were shouts, the loudest from the ground beneath the nose of the aeroplane. "It's quite all right," the English boy's voice said. "I pointed it west before I let it off. Nothing back there but Marine office and your brigade headquarters. Ronnie and I always do this before we go anywhere. Sorry if I was too soon. Oh, by the way," he added, "my name's Claude. Don't think I mentioned it."

On the ground, Bogard and two other officers stood. They had come up running. "Fired it west," one said. "How in hell does he know which way is west?"

"He's a sailor," the other said. "You forgot that."

"He seems to be a machine gunner too," Bogard said.

"Let's hope he doesn't forget that," the first said.

IV

NEVERTHELESS, Bogard kept an eye on the silhouetted head rising from the round gunpit in the nose ten feet ahead of him. "He did work that gun, though," he said to McGinnis beside him. "He even put the drum on himself, didn't he?"

"Yes," McGinnis said. "If he just doesn't forget and think that that gun is him and his tutor looking around from a Welsh alp."

"Maybe I should not have brought him," Bogard said. McGinnis didn't answer. Bogard jockeyed the wheel a little. Ahead, in the gunner's pit, the guest's head moved this way

and that continuously, looking. "We'll get there and unload and haul air for home," Bogard said. "Maybe in the dark—Confound it, it would be a shame for his country to be in this mess for four years and him not even to see a gun pointed in his direction."

"He'll see one tonight if he don't keep his head in," McGinnis said.

But the boy did not do that. Not even when they had reached the objective and McGinnis had crawled down to the bomb toggles. And even when the searchlights found them and Bogard signaled to the other machines and dived, the two engines snarling full speed into and through the bursting shells, he could see the boy's face in the searchlight's glare leaned far overside, coming sharply out as a spotlighted face on a stage, with an expression upon it of child-like interest and delight. "But he's firing that, Lewis," Bogard thought. "Straight too"; nosing the machine farther down, watching the pinpoint swing into the sights, his right hand lifted, waiting to drop into McGinnis' sight. He dropped his hand; above the noise of the engines he seemed to hear the click and whistle of the released bombs as the machine, freed of the weight, shot zooming in a long upward bounce that carried it for an instant out of the light. Then he was pretty busy for a time, coming into and through the shells again, shooting athwart another beam that caught and held long enough for him to see the English boy leaning far over the side, looking back and down past the right wing, the undercarriage. "Maybe he's read about it somewhere," Bogard thought, turning, looking back to pick up the rest of the flight.

Then it was all over, the darkness cool and empty and peaceful and almost quiet, with only the steady sound of the engines. McGinnis climbed back into the office, and standing up in his seat, he fired the colored pistol this time and stood

for a moment longer, looking backward toward where the searchlights still probed and sabered. He sat down again.

"O.K.," he said. "I counted all four of them. Let's haul air." Then he looked forward. "What's become of the King's Own? You didn't hang him onto a bomb release, did you?" Bogard looked. The forward pit was empty. It was in dim silhouette again now, against the stars, but there was nothing there now save the gun. "No," McGinnis said: "there he is. See? Leaning overside. Dammit, I told him not to spew it! There he comes back." The guest's head came into view again. But again it sank out of sight.

"He's coming back," Bogard said. "Stop him. Tell him we're going to have every squadron in the Hun Channel group on top of us in thirty minutes."

McGinnis swung himself down and stooped at the entrance to the passage. "Get back!" he shouted. The other was almost out; they squatted so, face to face like two dogs, shouting at one another above the noise of the still-unthrottled engines on either side of the fabric walls. The English boy's voice was thin and high.

"Bomb!" he shrieked.

"Yes," McGinnis shouted, "they were bombs! We gave them hell! Get back, I tell you! Have every Hun in France on us in ten minutes! Get back to your gun!"

Again the boy's voice came, high, faint above the noise: "Bomb! All right?"

"Yes! Yes! All right. Back to your gun, damn you!"

McGinnis climbed back into the office. "He went back. Want me to take her awhile?"

"All right," Bogard said. He passed McGinnis the wheel. "Ease her back some. I'd just as soon it was daylight when they come down on us."

"Right," McGinnis said. He moved the wheel suddenly. "What's the matter with that right wing?" he said. "Watch

it. . . . See? I'm flying on the right aileron and a little rudder. Feel it."

Bogard took the wheel a moment. "I didn't notice that. Wire somewhere, I guess. I didn't think any of those shells were that close. Watch her, though."

"Right," McGinnis said. "And so you are going with him on his boat tomorrow—today."

"Yes. I promised him. Confound it, you can't hurt a kid, you know."

"Why don't you take Collier along, with his mandolin? Then you could sail around and sing."

"I promised him," Bogard said. "Get that wing up a little."

"Right." McGinnis said.

Thirty minutes later it was beginning to be dawn; the sky was gray. Presently McGinnis said: "Well, here they come. Look at them! They look like mosquitoes in September. I hope he don't get worked up now and think he's playing beaver. If he does he'll just be one down to Ronnie, provided the devil has a beard. . . . Want the wheel?"

V

AT EIGHT O'CLOCK the beach, the Channel, was beneath them. Throttled back, the machine drifted down as Bogard ruddered it gently into the Channel wind. His face was strained, a little tired.

McGinnis looked tired, too, and he needed a shave.

"What do you guess he is looking at now?" he said. For again the English boy was leaning over the right side of the cockpit, looking backward and downward past the right wing.

"I don't know," Bogard said. "Maybe bullet holes." He blasted the port engine. "Must have the riggers—"

"He could see some closer than that," McGinnis said. "I'll

swear I saw tracer going into his back at one time. Or maybe it's the ocean he's looking at. But he must have seen that when he came over from England." Then Bogard leveled off; the nose rose sharply, the sand, the curling tide edge fled alongside. Yet still the English boy hung far overside, looking backward and downward at something beneath the right wing, his face rapt, with utter and childlike interest. Until the machine was completely stopped he continued to do so. Then he ducked down, and in the abrupt silence of the engines they could hear him crawling in the passage. He emerged just as the two pilots climbed stiffly down from the office, his face bright, eager; his voice high, excited.

"Oh, I say! Oh, good gad! What a chap. What a judge of distance! If Ronnie could only have seen! Oh, good gad! Or maybe they aren't like ours—don't load themselves as soon as the air strikes them."

The Americans looked at him. "What don't what?" McGinnis said. "The bomb. It was magnificent; I say, I shan't forget it. Oh, I say, you know! It was splendid!"

After a while McGinnis said, "The bomb?" in a fainting voice. Then the two pilots glared at each other; they said in unison: "That right wing!" Then as one they clawed down through the trap and, with the guest at their heels, they ran around the machine and looked beneath the right wing. The bomb, suspended by its tail, hung straight down like a plumb bob beside the right wheel, its tip just touching the sand. And parallel with the wheel track was the long delicate line in the sand where its ultimate tip had dragged. Behind them the English boy's voice was high, clear, childlike:

"Frightened, myself. Tried to tell you. But realized you knew your business better than I. Skill. Marvelous. Oh, I say, I shan't forget it."

VI

A MARINE with a bayoneted rifle passed Bogard onto the wharf and directed him to the boat. The wharf was empty, and he didn't even see the boat until he approached the edge of the wharf and looked directly down into it and upon the backs of two stooping men in greasy dungarees, who rose and glanced briefly at him and stooped again.

It was about thirty feet long and about three feet wide. It was painted with gray-green camouflage. It was quarter-decked forward, with two blunt, raked exhaust stacks. "Good Lord," Bogard thought, "if all that deck is engine—" Just aft the deck was the control seat; he saw a big wheel, an instrument panel. Rising to a height of about a foot above the free-board, and running from the stern forward to where the deck began, and continuing on across the after edge of the deck and thence back down the other gunwale to the stern, was a solid screen, also camouflaged, which inclosed the boat save for the width of the stern, which was open. Facing the steersman's seat like an eye was a hole in the screen about eight inches in diameter. And looking down into the long, narrow, still, vicious shape, he saw a machine gun swiveled at the stern, and he looked at the low screen—including which the whole vessel did not sit much more than a yard above water level—with its single empty forward-staring eye, and he thought quietly: "It's steel. It's made of steel." And his face was quite sober, quite thoughtful, and he drew his trench coat about him and buttoned it, as though he were getting cold.

He heard steps behind him and turned. But it was only an orderly from the aerodrome, accompanied by the marine with the rifle. The orderly was carrying a largish bundle wrapped in paper.

"From Lieutenant McGinnis to the captain," the orderly said.

Bogard took the bundle. The orderly and the marine retreated. He opened the bundle. It contained some objects and a scrawled note: The objects were a new yellow silk sofa cushion and a Japanese parasol, obviously borrowed, and a comb and a roll of toilet paper. The note said:

Couldn't find a camera anywhere and Collier wouldn't let me have his mandolin. But maybe Ronnie can play on the comb.

MAC.

Bogard looked at the objects. But his face was still quite thoughtful, quite grave. He rewrapped the things and carried the bundle on up the wharf and dropped it quietly into the water.

As he returned toward the invisible boat he saw two men approaching. He recognized the boy at once—tall, slender, already talking, voluble, his head bent a little toward his shorter companion, who plodded along beside him, hands in pockets, smoking a pipe. The boy still wore the pea-coat beneath a flapping oilskin, but in place of the rakish and casual cap he now wore an infantryman's soiled Balaclava helmet, with, floating behind him as though upon the sound of his voice, a curtainlike piece of cloth almost as long as a burnous.

"Hullo, there!" he cried, still a hundred yards away.

But it was the second man that Bogard was watching, thinking to himself that he had never in his life seen a more curious figure. There was something stolid about the very shape of his hunched shoulders, his slightly down-looking face. He was a head shorter than the other. His face was ruddy, too, but its mold was of a profound gravity that was almost dour. It was the face of a man of twenty who has been

for a year trying, even while asleep, to look twenty-one. He wore a high-necked sweater and dungaree slacks; above this a leather jacket; and above this a soiled naval officer's warmer that reached almost to his heels and which had one shoulder strap missing and not one remaining button at all. On his head was a plaid fore-and-aft deer stalker's cap, tied on by a narrow scarf brought across and down, hiding his ears, and then wrapped once about his throat and knotted with a hangman's noose beneath his left ear. It was unbelievably soiled, and with his hands elbow-deep in his pockets and his hunched shoulders and his bent head, he looked like someone's grandmother hung, say, for a witch. Clamped upside down between his teeth was a short brier pipe.

"Here he is!" the boy cried. "This is Ronnie. Captain Bogard."

"How are you?" Bogard said. He extended his hand. The other said no word, but his hand came forth, limp. It was quite cold, but it was hard, calloused. But he said no word; he just glanced briefly at Bogard and then away. But in that instant Bogard caught something in the look, something strange—a flicker; a kind of covert and curious respect, something like a boy of fifteen looking at a circus trapezist.

But he said no word. He ducked on; Bogard watched him drop from sight over the wharf edge as though he had jumped feet first into the sea. He remarked now that the engines in the invisible boat were running.

"We might get aboard too," the boy said. He started toward the boat, then he stopped. He touched Bogard's arm. "Yonder!" he hissed. "See?" His voice was thin with excitement.

"What?" Bogard also whispered; automatically he looked backward and upward, after old habit. The other was gripping his arm and pointing across the harbor.

"There! Over there. The Ergenstrasse. They have shifted

her again." Across the harbor lay an ancient, rusting, sway-backed hulk. It was small and nondescript, and, remembering, Bogard saw that the foremast was a strange mess of cables and booms, resembling—allowing for a great deal of license or lodseness of imagery—a basket mast. Beside him the boy was almost chortling. "Do you think that Ronnie noticed?" he hissed. "Do you?"

"I don't know," Bogard said.

"Oh, good gad! If he should glance up and call her before he notices, we'll be even. Oh, good gad! But come along." He went on; he was still chortling. "Careful," he said. "Frightful ladder."

He descended first, the two men in the boat rising and saluting. Ronnie had disappeared, save for his backside, which now filled a small hatch leading forward beneath the deck. Bogard descended gingerly.

"Good Lord," he said. "Do you have to climb up and down this every day?"

"Frightful, isn't it?" the other said, in his happy voice. "But you know yourself. Try to run a war with makeshifts, then wonder why it takes so long." The narrow hull slid and surged, even with Bogard's added weight. "Sits right on top, you see," the boy said. "Would float on a lawn, in a heavy dew. Goes right over them like a bit of paper."

"It does?" Bogard said.

"Oh, absolutely. That's why, you see." Bogard didn't see, but he was too busy letting himself gingerly down to a sitting posture. There were no thwarts; no seats save a long, thick, cylindrical ridge which ran along the bottom of the boat from the driver's seat to the stern. Ronnie had backed into sight. He now sat behind the wheel, bent over the instrument panel. But when he glanced back over his shoulder he did not speak. His face was merely interrogatory. Across his face there was now a long smudge of grease. The boy's face was empty, too, now.

"Right," he said. He looked forward, where one of the seamen had gone. "Ready forward?" he said.

"Aye, sir," the seaman said.

The other seaman was at the stern line. "Ready aft?"

"Aye, sir."

"Cast off." The boat sheered away, purring, a boiling of water under the stern! The boy looked down at Bogard. "Silly business. Do it shipshape, though. Can't tell when silly fourstriper—" His face changed again, immediate, solicitous. "I say. Will you be warm? I never thought to fetch—"

"I'll be all right," Bogard said. But the other was already taking off his oilskin. "No, no," Bogard said. "I won't take it."

"You'll tell me if you get cold?"

"Yes. Sure." He was looking down at the cylinder on which he sat. It was a half cylinder—that is, like the hot-water tank to some Gargantuan stove, sliced down the middle and bolted, open side down, to the floor plates. It was twenty feet long and more than two feet thick. Its top rose as high as the gunwales and between it and the hull on either side was just room enough for a man to place his feet to walk.

"That's Muriel," the boy said.

"Muriel?"

"Yes. The one before that was Agatha. After my aunt. The first one Ronnie and I had was Alice in Wonderland. Ronnie and I were the White Rabbit. Jolly, eh?"

"Oh, you and Ronnie have had three, have you?"

"Oh, yes," the boy said. He leaned down. "He didn't notice," he whispered. His face was again bright, gleeful. "When we come back," he said. "You watch."

"Oh," Bogard said. "The Ergenstrasse." He looked astern, and then he thought: "Good Lord! We must be going—traveling." He looked out now, broadside, and saw the harbor line fleeing past, and he thought to himself that the boat was well-nigh moving at the speed at which the Handley-

Page flew, left the ground. They were beginning to bound now, even in the sheltered water, from one wave crest to the next with a distinct shock. His hand still rested on the cylinder on which he sat. He looked down at it again, following it from where it seemed to emerge beneath Ronnie's seat, to where it beveled into the stern. "It's the air in her, I suppose," he said.

"The what?" the boy said.

"The air. Stored up in her. That makes the boat ride high."

"Oh, yes. I dare say. Very likely. I hadn't thought about it." He came forward, his burnous whipping in the wind, and sat down beside Bogard. Their heads were below the top of the screen.

Astern the harbor fled, diminishing, sinking into the sea. The boat had begun to lift now, swooping forward and down, shocking almost stationary for a moment, then lifting and swooping again; a gout of spray came aboard over the bows like a flung shovelful of shot. "I wish you'd take this coat," the boy said.

Bogard didn't answer. He looked around at the bright face. "We're outside, aren't we?" he said quietly.

"Yes. . . . Do take it, won't you?"

"Thanks, no. I'll be all right. We won't be long, anyway, I guess."

"No. We'll turn soon. It won't be so bad then."

"Yes. I'll be all right when we turn." Then they did turn. The motion became easier. That is, the boat didn't bang head-on, shuddering, into the swells. They came up beneath now, and the boat fled with increased speed, with a long, sickening, yawing motion, first to one side and then the other. But it fled on, and Bogard looked astern with that same soberness with which he had first looked down into the boat. "We're going east now," he said.

"With just a spot of north," the boy said. "Makes her ride a bit better, what?"

"Yes," Bogard said. Astern there was nothing now save empty sea and the delicate needlelike cant of the machine gun against the boiling and slewing wake, and the two seamen crouching quietly in the stern. "Yes. It's easier." Then he said: "How far do we go?"

The boy leaned closer. He moved closer. His voice was happy, confidential, proud, though lowered a little: "It's Ronnie's show. He thought of it. Not that I wouldn't have, in time. Gratitude and all that. But he's the older, you see. Thinks fast. Courtesy, *noblesse oblige*—all that. Thought of it soon as I told him this morning. I said, 'Oh, I say. I've been there. I've seen it'; and he said, 'Not flying'; and I said, 'Strewth'; and he said 'How far? No lying now'; and I said, 'Oh, far. Tremendous. Gone all night'; and he said, 'Flying all night. That must have been to Berlin'; and I said, 'I don't know. I dare say'; and he thought. I could see him thinking. Because he is the older, you see. More experience in courtesy, right thing. And he said, 'Berlin. No fun to that chap, dashing out and back with us.' And he thought and I waited, and I said, 'But we can't take him to Berlin. Too far. Don't know the way, either'; and he said—fast, like a shot—said, 'But there's Kiel'; and I knew—"

"What?" Bogard said. Without moving, his whole body sprang. "Kiel? In this?"

"Absolutely. Ronnie thought of it. Smart, even if he is a stickler. Said at once, 'Zeebrugge no show at all for that chap. Must do best we can for him. Berlin,' Ronnie said. 'My Gad! Berlin.'"

"Listen," Bogard said. He had turned now, facing the other, his face quite grave. "What is this boat for?"

"For?"

"What does it do?" Then, knowing beforehand the

answer to his own question, he said, putting his hand on the cylinder: "What is this in here? A torpedo, isn't it?"

"I thought you knew," the boy said.

"No," Bogard said. "I didn't know." His voice seemed to reach him from a distance, dry, cricketlike: "How do you fire it?"

"Fire it?"

"How do you get it out of the boat? When that hatch was open a while ago I could see the engines. They were right in front of the end of this tube."

"Oh," the boy said. "You pull a gadget there and the torpedo drops out astern. As soon as the screw touches the water it begins to turn, and then the torpedo is ready, loaded. Then all you have to do is turn the boat quickly and the torpedo goes on."

"You mean—" Bogard said. After a moment his voice obeyed him again. "You mean you aim the torpedo with the boat and release it and it starts moving, and you turn the boat out of the way and the torpedo passes through the same water that the boat just vacated?"

"Knew you'd catch on," the boy said. "Told Ronnie so. Airman. Tamer than yours, though. But can't be helped. Best we can do, just on water. But knew you'd catch on."

"Listen," Bogard said. His voice sounded to him quite calm. The boat fled on, yawing over the swells. He sat quite motionless. It seemed to him that he could hear himself talking to himself: "Go on. Ask him. Ask him what? Ask him how close to the ship do you have to be before you fire. . . . Listen," he said, in that calm voice. "Now, you tell Ronnie, you see. You just tell him—just say—" He could feel his voice rattling off on him again, so he stopped it. He sat quite motionless, waiting for it to come back; the boy leaning now, looking at his face. Again the boy's voice was solicitous:

"I say. You're not feeling well. These confounded shallow boats."

"It's not that," Bogard said. "I just— Do your orders say Kiel?"

"Oh, no. They let Ronnie say. Just so we bring the boat back. This is for you. Gratitude. Ronnie's idea. Tame, after flying. But if you'd rather, eh?"

"Yes, some place closer. You see, I—"

"Quite. I see. No vacations in wartime. I'll tell Ronnie." He went forward. Bogard did not move. The boat fled in long, slewing swoops. Bogard looked quietly astern, at the scudding sea, the sky.

"My God!" he thought. "Can you beat it? Can you beat it?"

The boy came back; Bogard turned to him a face the color of dirty paper. "All right now," the boy said. "Not Kiel. Nearer place, hunting probably just as good. Ronnie says he knows you will understand." He was tugging at his pocket. He brought out a bottle. "Here. Haven't forgot last night. Do the same for you. Good for the stomach, eh?"

Bogard drank, gulping—a big one. He extended the bottle, but the boy refused. "Never touch it on duty," he said. "Not like you chaps. Tame here."

The boat fled on. The sun was already down the west. But Bogard had lost all count of time, of distance. Ahead he could see white seas through the round eye opposite Ronnie's face, and Ronnie's hand on the wheel and the granitelike jut of his profiled jaw and the dead upside-down pipe. The boat fled on.

Then the boy leaned and touched his shoulder. He half rose. The boy was pointing. The sun was reddish; against it, outside them and about two miles away, a vessel—a trawler, it looked like—at anchor swung a tall mast.

"Lightship!" the boy shouted. "Theirs." Ahead Bogard

could see a low, flat mole—the entrance to a harbor. “Channel!” the boy shouted. He swept his arm in both directions. “Mines!” His voice swept back on the wind. “Place filthy with them. All sides. Beneath us too. Lark, eh?”

VII

AGAINST THE MOLE a fair surf was beating. Running before the seas now, the boat seemed to leap from one roller to the next; in the intervals while the screw was in the air the engine seemed to be trying to tear itself out by the roots. But it did not slow; when it passed the end of the mole the boat seemed to be standing almost erect on its rudder, like a sailfish. The mole was a mile away. From the end of it little faint lights began to flicker like fireflies. The boy leaned. “Down,” he said. “Machine guns. Might stop a stray.”

“What do I do?” Bogard shouted. “What can I do?”

“Stout fellow! Give them hell, what? Knew you’d like it!”

Crouching, Bogard looked up at the boy, his face wild. “I can handle the machine gun!”

“No need,” the boy shouted back. “Give them first innings. Sporting. Visitors, eh?” He was looking forward. “There she is. See?” They were in the harbor now, the basin opening before them. Anchored in the channel was a big freighter. Painted midships of the hull was a huge Argentine flag. “Must get back to stations!” the boy shouted down to him. Then at that moment Ronnie spoke for the first time. The boat was hurtling along now in smoother water. Its speed did not slacken and Ronnie did not turn his head when he spoke. He just swung his jutting jaw and the clamped cold pipe a little, and said from the side of his mouth a single word:

“Beaver.”

The boy, stooped over what he had called his gadget,

jerked up, his expression astonished and outraged. Bogard also looked forward and saw Ronnie's arm pointing to starboard. It was a light cruiser at anchor a mile away. She had basket masts, and as he looked a gun flashed from her after turret. "Oh, damn!" the boy cried. "Oh, you putt! Oh, confound you, Ronnie! Now I'm three down!" But he had already stooped again over his gadget, his face bright and empty and alert again; not sober; just calm, waiting. Again Bogard looked forward and felt the boat pivot on its rudder and head directly for the freighter at terrific speed, Ronnie now with one hand on the wheel and the other lifted and extended at the height of his head.

But it seemed to Bogard that the hand would never drop. He crouched, not sitting, watching with a kind of quiet horror the painted flag increase like a moving picture of a locomotive taken from between the rails. Again the gun crashed from the cruiser behind them, and the freighter fired point-blank at them from its poop. Bogard heard neither shot.

"Man, man!" he shouted. "For God's sake!"

Ronnie's hand dropped. Again the boat spun on its rudder. Bogard saw the bow rise, pivoting; he expected the hull to slam broadside on into the ship. But it didn't. It shot off on a long tangent. He was waiting for it to make a wide sweep, heading seaward, putting the freighter astern, and he thought of the cruiser again. "Get a broadside, this time, once we clear the freighter," he thought. Then he remembered the freighter, the torpedo, and he looked back toward the freighter to watch the torpedo strike, and saw to his horror that the boat was now bearing down on the freighter again, in a skidding turn. Like a man in a dream, he watched himself rush down upon the ship and shoot past under her counter, still skidding, close enough to see the faces on her decks. "They missed and they are going to run down the

torpedo and catch it and shoot it again," he thought idiotically.

So the boy had no touch his shoulder before he knew he was behind him. The boy's voice was quite calm: "Under Ronnie's seat there. A bit of a crank handle. If you'll just hand it to me—"

He found the crank. He passed it back; he was thinking dreamily: "Mac would say they had a telephone on board." But he didn't look at once to see what the boy was doing with it, for in that still and peaceful horror he was watching Ronnie, the cold pipe rigid in his jaw, hurling the boat at top speed round and round the freighter, so near that he could see the rivets in the plates. Then he looked aft, his face wild, importunate, and he saw what the boy was doing with the crank. He had fitted it into what was obviously a small windlass low on one flank of the tube near the head. He glanced up and saw Bogard's face. "Didn't go that time!" he shouted cheerfully.

"Go?" Bogard shouted. "It didn't— The torpedo—"

The boy and one of the seamen were quite busy, stooping over the windlass and the tube. "No. Clumsy. Always happening. Should think clever chaps like engineers— Happens, though. Draw her in and try her again."

"But the nose, the cap!" Bogard shouted. "It's still in the tube, isn't it? It's all right, isn't it?"

"Absolutely. But it's working now. Loaded. Screw's started turning. Get it back and drop it clear. If we should stop or slow up it would overtake us. Drive back into the tube. Bingo! What?"

Bogard was on his feet now, turned, braced to the terrific merry-go-round of the boat. High above them the freighter seemed to be spinning on her heel like a trick picture in the movies. "Let me have that winch!" he cried.

"Steady!" the boy said. "Mustn't draw her back too fast.

Jam her into the head of the tube ourselves. Same bingo! Best let us. Every cobbler to his last, what?"

"Oh, quite," Bogard said. "Oh, absolutely." It was like someone else was using his mouth. He leaned, braced, his hands on the cold tube, beside the others. He was hot inside, but his outside was cold. He could feel all his flesh jerking with cold as he watched the blunt, grained hand of the seaman turning the windlass in short, easy, inch-long arcs, while at the head of the tube the boy bent, tapping the cylinder with a spanner, lightly, his head turned with listening delicate and deliberate as a watchmaker. The boat rushed on in those furious, slewing turns. Bogard saw a long, drooping thread loop down from somebody's mouth, between his hands, and he found that the thread came from his own mouth.

He didn't hear the boy speak, nor notice when he stood up. He just felt the boat straighten out, flinging him to his knees beside the tube. The seaman had gone back to the stern and the boy stooped again over his gadget. Bogard knelt now, quite sick. He did not feel the boat when it swung again, nor hear the gun from the cruiser which had not dared to fire and the freighter which had not been able to fire, firing again. He did not feel anything at all when he saw the huge, painted flag directly ahead and increasing with locomotive speed, and Ronnie's lifted hand drop. But this time he knew that the torpedo was gone; in pivoting and spinning this time the whole boat seemed to leave the water; he saw the bow of the boat shoot skyward like the nose of a pursuit ship going into a wingover. Then his outraged stomach denied him. He saw neither the geyser nor heard the detonation as he sprawled over the tube. He felt only a hand grasp him by the slack of his coat, and the voice of one of the seamen: "Steady all, sir. I've got you."

VIII

A VOICE ROUSED HIM, a hand. He was half sitting in the narrow starboard runway, half lying across the tube. He had been there for quite a while; quite a while ago he had felt someone spread a garment over him. But he had not raised his head. "I'm all right," he had said. "You keep it."

"Don't need it," the boy said. "Going home now."

"I'm sorry I—" Bogard said.

"Quite. Confounded shallow boats. Turn any stomach until you get used to them. Ronnie and I both, at first. Each time. You wouldn't believe it. Believe human stomach hold so much. Here." It was the bottle. "Good drink. Take enormous one. Good for stomach."

Bogard drank. Soon he did feel better, warmer. When the hand touched him later, he found that he had been asleep.

It was the boy again. The pea-coat was too small for him; shrunken, perhaps. Below the cuffs his long, slender, girl's wrists were blue with cold. Then Bogard realized what the garment was that had been laid over him. But before Bogard could speak, the boy leaned down, whispering; his face was gleeful: "He didn't notice!"

"What?"

"Ergenstrasse! He didn't notice that they had shifted her. Gad, I'd be just one down, then." He watched Bogard's face with bright, eager eyes. "Beaver, you know. I say. Feeling better, eh?"

"Yes," Bogard said, "I am."

"He didn't notice at all. Oh, gad! Oh, Jove!"

Bogard rose and sat on the tube. The entrance to the harbor was just ahead; the boat had slowed a little. It was just dusk. He said quietly: "Does this often happen?" The boy looked at him. Bogard touched the tube. "This. Failing to go out."

"Oh, yes. Why they put the windlass on them. That was later. Made first boat; whole thing blew up one day. So put on windlass."

"But it happens sometimes, even now! I mean, sometimes they blow up, even with the windlass?"

"Well, can't say, of course. Boats go out. Not come back. Possible. Not ever know, of course. Not heard of one captured yet, though. Possible. Not to us, though. Not yet."

"Yes," Bogard said. "Yes." They entered the harbor, the boat moving still fast, but throttled now and smooth, across the dusk-filled basin. Again the boy leaned down, his voice gleeful.

"Not a word, now!" he hissed. "Steady all!" He stood up; he raised his voice: "I say, Ronnie." Ronnie did not turn his head, but Bogard could tell that he was listening. "That Argentine ship was amusing, eh? In there. How do you suppose it got past us here? Might have stopped here as well. French would buy the wheat." He paused, diabolical—Machiavelli with the face of a strayed angel. "I say. How long has it been since we had a strange ship in here? Been months, eh?" Again he leaned, hissing. "Watch, now!" But Bogard could not see Ronnie's head move at all. "He's looking, though!" the boy whispered, breathed. And Ronnie was looking, though his head had not moved at all. Then there came into view, in silhouette against the dusk-filled sky, the vague, basket-like shape of the interned vessel's foremast. At once Ronnie's arm rose, pointing; again he spoke without turning his head, out of the side of his mouth, past the cold, clamped pipe, a single word:

"Beaver."

The boy moved like a released spring, like a heeled dog freed. "Oh, damn you!" he cried. "Oh, you putt! It's the Ergenstrasse! Oh, confound you! I'm just one down now!" He had stepped in one stride completely over Bogard, and

he now leaned down over Ronnie. "What?" The boat was slowing in toward the wharf, the engine idle. "Aren't I, Ronnie? Just one down now?"

The boat drifted in; the seaman had again crawled forward onto the deck. Ronnie spoke for the third and last time. "Right," he said.

IX

"I WANT," Bogard said, "a case of Scotch. The best we've got. And fix it up good. It's to go to town. And I want a responsible man to deliver it." The responsible man came. "This is for a child," Bogard said, indicating the package. "You'll find him in the Street of the Twelve Hours, somewhere near the Café Twelve Hours. He'll be in the gutter. You'll know him. A child about six feet long. Any English M. P. will show him to you. If he is asleep, don't wake him. Just sit there and wait until he wakes up. Then give him this. Tell him it is from Captain Bogard."

X

ABOUT A MONTH LATER a copy of the English Gazette which had strayed onto an American aerodrome carried the following item in the casualty lists:

MISSING: Torpedo Boat XOOI. Midshipmen R. Boyce Smith and L. C. W. Hope, R. N. R., Boatswain's Mate Burt and Able Seaman Reeves. Channel Fleet, Light Torpedo Division. Failed to return from coast patrol duty.

Shortly after that the American Air Service headquarters also issued a bulletin:

For extraordinary valor over and beyond the routine of

duty, Captain H. S. Bogard, with his crew, composed of Second Lieutenant Darrel McGinnis and Aviation Gunners Watts and Harper, on a daylight raid and without scout protection, destroyed with bombs an ammunition depot several miles behind the enemy's lines. From here, beset by enemy aircraft in superior numbers, these men proceeded with what bombs remained to the enemy's corps headquarters at Blank and partially demolished this château, and then returned safely without loss of a man.

And regarding which exploit, it might have added, had it failed and had Captain Bogard come out of it alive, he would have been immediately and thoroughly court-martialed.

Carrying his remaining two bombs, he had dived the Handley-Page at the château where the generals sat at lunch, until McGinnis, at the toggles below him, began to shout at him, before he ever signaled. He didn't signal until he could discern separately the slate tiles of the roof. Then his hand dropped and he zoomed, and he held the aeroplane so, in its wild snarl, his lips parted, his breath hissing, thinking: "God! God! If they were all there—all the generals, the admirals, the presidents and the kings—theirs, ours—all of them."

SUTPEN STOOD ABOVE the pallet bed on which the mother and child lay. Between the shrunken planking of the wall the early sunlight fell in long pencil strokes, breaking upon his straddled legs and upon the riding whip in his hand, and lay across the still shape of the mother, who lay looking up at him from still, inscrutable, sullen eyes, the child at her side wrapped in a piece of dingy though clean cloth. Behind them an old Negro woman squatted beside the rough hearth where a meager fire smoldered.

"Well, Milly," Sutpen said, "too bad you're not a mare. Then I could give you a decent stall in the stable."

Still the girl on the pallet did not move. She merely continued to look up at him without expression, with a young, sullen, inscrutable face still pale from recent travail. Sutpen moved, bringing into the splintered pencils of sunlight the face of a man of sixty. He said quietly to the squatting Negress, "Griselda foaled this morning."

"Horse or mare?" the Negress said.

"A horse. A damned fine colt. . . . What's this?" He indicated the pallet with the hand which held the whip.

"That un's a mare, I reckon."

"Hah," Sutpen said. "A damned fine colt. Going to be the spit and image of old Rob Roy when I rode him North in '61. Do you remember?"

"Yes, Marster."

"Hah." He glanded back towards the pallet. None could have said if the girl still watched him or not. Again his whip hand indicated the pallet. "Do whatever they need with whatever we've got to do it with." He went out, passing out the crazy doorway and stepping down into the rank weeds (there yet leaned rusting against the corner of the porch the scythe which Wash had borrowed from him three months ago to cut them with) where his horse waited, where Wash stood holding the reins.

When Colonel Sutpen rode away to fight the Yankees, Wash did not go. "I'm looking after the Kernel's place and niggers," he would tell all who asked him and some who had not asked—a gaunt, malaria-ridden man with pale, questioning eyes, who looked about thirty-five, though it was known that he had not only a daughter but an eight-year-old granddaughter as well. This was a lie, as most of them—the few remaining men between eighteen and fifty—to whom he told it, knew, though there were some who believed that he himself really believed it, though even these believed that he had better sense than to put it to the test with Mrs. Sutpen or the Sutpen slaves. Knew better or was just too lazy and shiftless to try it, they said, knowing that his sole connection with the Sutpen plantation lay in the fact that for years now Colonel Sutpen had allowed him to squat in a crazy shack on a slough in the river bottom on the Sutpen place, which Sutpen had built for a fishing lodge in his bachelor days and which had since fallen in dilapidation from disuse, so that now it looked like an aged or sick wild beast crawled terrifically there to drink in the act of dying.

The Sutpen slaves themselves heard of his statement. They laughed. It was not the first time they had laughed at him, calling him white trash behind his back. They began to ask

him themselves, in groups, meeting him in the faint road which led up from the slough and the old fish camp, "Why ain't you at de war, white man?"

Pausing, he would look about the ring of black faces and white eyes and teeth behind which derision lurked. "Because I got a daughter and family to keep," he said. "Git out of my road, niggers."

"Niggers?" they repeated; "niggers?" laughing now. "Who him, calling us niggers?"

"Yes," he said. "I ain't got no niggers to look after my folks if I was gone."

"Nor nothing else but dat shack down yon dat Cunnel wouldn't *let* none of us live in."

Now he cursed them; sometimes he rushed at them, snatching up a stick from the ground while they scattered before him, yet seeming to surround him still with that black laughing, derisive, evasive, inescapable, leaving him panting and impotent and raging. Once it happened in the very back yard of the big house itself. This was after bitter news had come down from the Tennessee mountains and from Vicksburg, and Sherman had passed through the plantation, and most of the Negroes had followed him. Almost everything else had gone with the Federal troops, and Mrs. Sutpen had sent word to Wash that he could have the scuppernongs ripening in the arbor in the back yard. This time it was a house servant, one of the few Negroes who remained; this time the Negress had to retreat up the kitchen steps, where she turned. "Stop right dar, white man. Stop right whar you is. You ain't never crossed dese steps whilst Cunnel here, and you ain't ghy' do hit now."

This was true. But there was this of a kind of pride: he had never tried to enter the big house, even though he believed that if he had, Sutpen would have received him, permitted him. "But I ain't going to give no black nigger the

chance to tell me / can't go nowhere," he said to himself. "I ain't even going to give Kernel the chance to have to cuss a nigger on my account." This, though he and Sutpen had spent more than one afternoon together on those rare Sundays when there would be no company in the house. Perhaps his mind knew that it was because Sutpen had nothing else to do, being a man who could not bear his own company. Yet the fact remained that the two of them would spend whole afternoons in the scuppernong arbor, Sutpen in the hammock and Wash squatting against a post, a pail of cistern water between them, taking drink for drink from the same demijohn. Meanwhile on weekdays he would see the fine figure of the man—they were the same age almost to a day, though neither of them (perhaps because Wash had a grandchild while Sutpen's son was a youth in school) ever thought of himself as being so—on the fine figure of the black stallion, galloping about the plantation. For that moment his heart would be quiet and proud. It would seem to him that that world in which Negroes, whom the Bible told him had been created and cursed by God to be brute and vassal to all men of white skin, were better found and housed and even clothed than he and his; that world in which he sensed always about him mocking echoes of black laughter was but a dream and an illusion, and that the actual world was this one across which his own lonely apotheosis seemed to gallop on the black thoroughbred, thinking how the Book said also that all men were created in the image of God and hence all men made the same image in God's eyes at least; so that he could say, as though speaking of himself, "A fine proud man. If God Himself was to come down and ride the natural earth, that's what He would aim to look like."

Sutpen returned in 1865, on the black stallion. He seemed to have aged ten years. His son had been killed in action the

same winter in which his wife had died. He returned with his citation for gallantry from the hand of General Lee to a ruined plantation, where for a year now his daughter had subsisted partially on the meager bounty of the man to whom fifteen years ago he had granted permission to live in that tumbledown fishing camp whose very existence he had at the time forgotten. Wash was there to meet him, unchanged: still gaunt, still ageless, with his pale, questioning gaze, his air diffident, a little servile, a little familiar. "Well, Kernel," Wash said, "they kilt us but they ain't whupped us yit, air they?"

That was the tenor of their conversation for the next five years. It was inferior whisky which they drank now together from a stoneware jug, and it was not in the scuppernong arbor. It was in the rear of the little store which Sutpen managed to set up on the highroad: a frame shelved room where, with Wash for clerk and porter, he dispensed kerosene and staple foodstuffs and stale gaudy candy and cheap beads and ribbons to Negroes or poor whites of Wash's own kind, who came afoot or on gaunt mules to haggle tediously for dimes and quarters with a man who at one time could gallop (the black stallion was still alive; the stable in which his jealous get lived was in better repair than the house where the master himself lived)¹ for ten miles across his own fertile land and who had led troops gallantly in battle; until Sutpen in fury would empty the store, close and lock the doors from the inside. Then he and Wash would repair to the rear and the jug. But the talk would not be quiet now, as when Sutpen lay in the hammock, delivering an arrogant monologue while Wash squatted guffawing against his post. They both sat now, though Sutpen had the single chair while Wash used whatever box or keg was handy, and even this for just a little while, because soon Sutpen would reach that stage of impotent and furious un-

defeat in which he would rise, swaying and plunging, and declare again that he would take his pistol and the black stallion and ride single-handed into Washington and kill Lincoln, dead now, and Sherman, now a private citizen. "Kill them!" he would shout. "Shoot them down like the dogs they are—"

"Sho, Kernel; sho, Kernel," Wash would say, catching Sutpen as he fell. Then he would commandeer the first passing wagon or, lacking that, he would walk the mile to the nearest neighbor and borrow one and return and carry Sutpen home. He entered the house now. He had been doing so for a long time; taking Sutpen home in whatever borrowed wagon might be, talking him into locomotion with cajoling murmurs as though he were a horse, a stallion himself. The daughter would meet them and hold open the door without a word. He would carry his burden through the once white formal entrance, surmounted by a fanlight imported piece by piece from Europe and with a board now nailed over a missing pane, across a velvet carpet from which all nap was now gone, and up a formal stairs, now but a fading ghost of bare boards between two strips of fading paint, and into the bedroom. It would be dusk by now, and he would let his burden sprawl onto the bed and undress it and then he would sit quietly in a chair beside. After a time the daughter would come to the door. "We're all right now," he would tell her. "Don't you worry none, Miss Judith."

Then it would become dark, and after a while he would lie down on the floor beside the bed, though not to sleep, because after a time—sometimes before midnight—the man on the bed would stir and groan and then speak. "Wash?"

"Hyer I am, Kernel. You go back to sleep. We ain't whupped yit, air we? Me and you kin do hit."

Even then he had already seen the ribbon about his grand

daughter's waist. She was now fifteen, already mature, after the early way of her kind. He knew where the ribbon came from; he had been seeing it and its kind daily for three years, even if she had lied about where she got it, which she did not, at once bold, sullen, and fearful. "Sho now," he said. "Ef Kernel wants to give hit to you, I hope you minded to thank him."

His heart was quiet, even when he saw the dress, watching her secret, defiant, frightened face when she told him that Miss Judith, the daughter, had helped her to make it. But he was quite grave when he approached Sutpen after they closed the store that afternoon, following the other to the rear.

"Get the jug," Sutpen directed.

"Wait," Wash said. "Not yit for a minute."

Neither did Sutpen deny the dress. "What about it?" he said.

But Wash met his arrogant stare; he spoke quietly. "I've knowed you for going on twenty years. I ain't never yit denied to do what you told me to do. And I'm a man nigh sixty. And she ain't nothing but a fifteen-year-old gal."

"Meaning that I'd harm a girl? I, a man as old as you are?"

"If you was ara other man, I'd say you was as old as me. And old or no old, I wouldn't let her keep that dress nor nothing else that come from your hand. But you are different."

"How different?" But Wash merely looked at him with his pale, questioning, sober eyes. "So that's why you are afraid of me?"

Now Wash's gaze no longer questioned. It was tranquil, serene. "I ain't afraid. Because you air brave. It ain't that you were a brave man at one minute or day of your life and got a paper to show hit from General Lee. But you air brave, the same as you air alive and breathing. That's where

hit's different. Hit don't need no ticket from nobody to tell me that. And I know that whatever you handle or tech, whether hit's a regiment of men or a ignorant gal or just a hound dog, that you will make hit right."

Now it was Sutpen who looked away, turning suddenly, brusquely. "Get the jug," he said sharply.

"Sho, Kernel," Wash said.

So on that Sunday dawn two years later, having watched the Negro midwife, which he had walked three miles to fetch, enter the crazy door beyond which his granddaughter lay wailing, his heart was still quiet though concerned. He knew what they had been saying—the Negroes in cabins about the land, the white men who loafed all day long about the store, watching quietly the three of them: Sutpen, himself, his granddaughter with her air of brazen and shrinking defiance as her condition became daily more and more obvious, like three actors that came and went upon a stage. "I know what they say to one another," he thought. "I can almost hyear them: *Wash Jones has fixed old Sutpen at last. Hit taken him twenty years, but he has done hit at last.*"

It would be dawn after a while, though not yet. From the house, where the lamp shone dim beyond the warped door-frame, his granddaughter's voice came steadily as though run by a clock, while thinking went slowly and terrifically, fumbling, involved somehow with a sound of galloping hooves, until there broke suddenly free in mid-gallop the fine proud figure of the man on the fine proud stallion, galloping; and then that at which thinking fumbled, broke free too and quite clear, not in justification nor even explanation, but as the apotheosis, lonely, explicable, beyond all fouling by human touch: "He is bigger than all them Yankees that kilt his son and his wife and taken his niggers and ruined his land, bigger than this hyer durn country that

he fit for and that has denied him into keeping a little country store; bigger than the denial which hit helt to his lips like the bitter cup in the Book. And how could I have lived this nigh to him for twenty years without being teched and changed by him? Maybe I ain't as big as him and maybe I ain't done none of the galloping. But at least I done been drug along. Me and him kin do hit, if so be he will show me what he aims for me to do."

Then it was dawn. Suddenly he could see the house, and the old Negress in the door looking at him. Then he realized that his granddaughter's voice had ceased. "It's a girl," the Negress said. "You can go tell him if you want to." She re-entered the house.

"A girl," he repeated; "a girl"; in astonishment, hearing the galloping hooves, seeing the proud galloping figure emerge again. He seemed to watch it pass, galloping through avatars which marked the accumulation of years, time, to the climax where it galloped beneath a brandished saber and a shot-torn flag rushing down a sky in color like thunderous sulphur, thinking for the first time in his life that perhaps Sutpen was an old man like himself. "Gittin a gal," he thought in that astonishment; then he thought with the pleased surprise of a child: "Yes, sir. Be dawg, if I ain't lived to be a great-grandpaw after all."

He entered the house. He moved clumsily, on tiptoe, as if he no longer lived there, as if the infant which had just drawn breath and cried in light had dispossessed him, be it of his own blood too though it might. But even above the pallet he could see little save the blur of his granddaughter's exhausted face. Then the Negress squatting at the hearth spoke, "You better gawn tell him if you going to. Hit's daylight now."

But this was not necessary. He had no more than turned the corner of the porch where the scythe leaned which he

had borrowed three months ago to clear away the weeds through which he walked, when Sutpen himself rode up on the old stallion. He did not wonder how Sutpen had got the word. He took it for granted that this was what had brought the other out at this hour on Sunday morning, and he stood while the other dismounted, and he took the reins from Sutpen's hand, an expression on his gaunt face almost imbecile with a kind of weary triumph, saying, "Hit's a gal, Kernel. I be dawg if you ain't as old as I am—" until Sutpen passed him and entered the house. He stood there with the reins in his hand and heard Sutpen cross the floor to the pallet. He heard what Sutpen said, and something seemed to stop dead in him before going on.

The sun was now up, the swift sun of Mississippi latitudes, and it seemed to him that he stood beneath a strange sky, in a strange scene, familiar only as things are familiar in dreams, like the dreams of falling to one who has never climbed. "I kain't have heard what I thought I heard," he thought quietly. "I know I kain't." Yet the voice, the familiar voice which had said the words was still speaking, talking now to the old Negress about a colt foaled that morning. "That's why he was up so early," he thought. "That was hit. Hit ain't me and mine. Hit ain't even hisn that got him outen bed."

Sutpen emerged. He descended into the weeds, moving with that heavy deliberation which would have been haste when he was younger. He had not yet looked full at Wash. He said, "Dicey will stay and tend to her. You better—" Then he seemed to see Wash facing him and paused. "What?" he said.

"You said—" To his own ears Wash's voice sounded flat and ducklike, like a deaf man's. "You said if she was a mare, you could give her a good stall in the stable."

"Well?" Sutpen said. His eyes widened and narrowed,

almost like a man's fists flexing and shutting, as Wash began to advance towards him, stooping a little. Very astonishment kept Sutpen still for the moment, watching that man whom in twenty years he had no more known to make any motion save at command than he had the horse which he rode. Again his eyes narrowed and widened; without moving he seemed to rear suddenly upright. "Stand back," he said suddenly and sharply. "Don't you touch me."

"I'm going to tech you, Kernel," Wash said in that flat, quiet, almost soft voice, advancing.

Sutpen raised the hand which held the riding whip; the old Negress peered around the crazy door with her black gargoyle face of a worn gnome. "Stand back, Wash," Sutpen said. Then he struck. The old Negress leaped down into the weeds with the agility of a goat and fled. Sutpen slashed Wash again across the face with the whip, striking him to his knees. When Wash rose and advanced once more he held in his hands the scythe which he had borrowed from Sutpen three months ago and which Surpen would never need again.

When he reentered the house his granddaughter stirred on the pallet bed and called his name fretfully. "What was that?" she said.

"What was what, honey?"

"That ere racket out there."

"I warn't nothing," he said gently. He knelt and touched her not forehead clumsily. "Do you want ara thing?"

"I want a sup of water," she said querulously. "I been laying here wanting a sup of water a long time, but don't nobody care enough to pay me no mind."

"Sho now," he said soothingly. He rose stiffly and fetched the dipper of water and raised her head to drink and laid her back and watched her turn to the child with an absolutely stonelike face. But a moment later he saw that she was cry-

ing quietly. "Now, now," he said, "I wouldn't do that. Old Dicey says hit's a right fine gal. Hit's all right now. Hit's all over now. Hit ain't no need to cry now."

But she continued to cry quietly, almost sullenly, and he rose again and stood uncomfortably above the pallet for a time, thinking as he had thought when his own wife lay so and then his daughter in turn: "Women. Hit's a mystry to me. They seem to want em, and yit when they git em they cry about hit. Hit's a mystry to me. To ard man." Then he moved away and drew a chair up to the window and sat down.

Through all that long, bright, sunny forenoon he sat at the window, waiting. Now and then he rose and tiptoed to the pallet. But his granddaughter slept now, her face sullen and calm and weary, the child in the crook of her arm. Then he returned to the chair and sat again, waiting, wondering why it took them so long, until he remembered that it was Sunday. He was sitting there at mid-afternoon when a half-grown white boy came around the corner of the house upon the body and gave a choked cry and looked up and glared for a mesmerized instant at Wash in the window before he turned and fled. Then Wash rose and tiptoed again to the pallet.

The granddaughter was awake now, wakened perhaps by the boy's cry without hearing it. "Milly," he said, "air you hungry?" She didn't answer, turning her face away. He built up the fire on the hearth and cooked the food which he had brought home the day before: fatback it was, and cold corn pone; he poured water into the stale coffee pot and heated it. But she would not eat, when he carried the plate to her, so he ate himself, quietly, alone, and left the dishes as they were and returned to the window.

Now he seemed to sense, feel, the men who would be gathering with horses and guns and dogs—the curious, and

the vengeful: men of Sutpen's own kind, who had made the company about Sutpen's table in the time when Wash himself had yet to approach nearer to the house than the scuppernong arbor—men who had also shown the lesser ones how to fight in battle, who maybe also had signed papers from the generals saying that they were among the first of the brave; who had also galloped in the old days arrogant and proud on the fine horses across the fine plantations—symbols also of admiration and hope; instruments too of despair and grief.

That was whom they would expect him to run from. It seemed to him that he had no more to run from than he had to run to. If he ran, he would merely be fleeing one set of bragging and evil shadows for another just like them, since they were all of a kind throughout all the earth which he knew, and he was old, too old to flee far even if he were to flee. He could never escape them, no matter how much or how far he ran: a man going on sixty could not run that far. Not far enough to escape beyond the boundaries of earth where such men lived, set the order and the rule of living. It seemed to him that he now saw for the first time, after five years, how it was that Yankees or any other living armies had managed to whip them: the gallant, the proud, the brave; the acknowledged and chosen best among them all to carry courage and honor and pride. Maybe if he had gone to the war with them he would have discovered them sooner. But if he had discovered them sooner, what would he have done with his life since? How could he have borne to remember for five years what his life had been before?

Now it was getting toward sunset. The child had been crying; when he went to the pallet he saw his granddaughter nursing it, her face still bemused, sullen, inscrutable. "Air you hungry yit?" he said.

"I don't want nothing."

"You ought to eat."

This time she did not answer at all, looking down at the child. He returned to his chair and found that the sun had set. "Hit kain't be much longer," he thought. He could feel them quite near now, the curious and the vengeful. He could even seem to hear what they were saying about him, the undercurrent of believing beyond the immediate fury: *Old Wash Jones he come a tumble at last. He thought he had Sutpen, but Sutpen fooled him. He thought he had Kernel where he would have to marry the gal or pay up, And Kernel refused.* "But I never expected that, Kernel!" he cried aloud, catching himself at the sound of his own voice, glancing quickly back to find his granddaughter watching him.

"Who you talking to now?" she said.

"Hit ain't nothing. I was just thinking and talked out before I knowed hit."

Her face was becoming indistinct again, again a sullen blur in the twilight. "I reckon so. I reckon you'll have to holler louder than that before he'll hear you, up yonder at that house. And I reckon you'll need to do more than holler before you get him down here too."

"Sho now," he said. "Don't you worry none." But already thinking was going smoothly on: "You know I never. You know how I ain't never expected or asked nothing from ara living man but what I expected from you. And I never asked that. I didn't think hit would need. I said, *I don't need to. What need has a fellow like Wash Jones to question or doubt the man that General Lee himself says in a handwrote ticket that he was brave?* Brave," he thought. "Better if nara one of them had never rid back home in '65"; thinking *Better if his kind and mine too had never drawh the breath of life on this earth. Better that aî who remain of us be blasted from the face of earth than tha another Wash Jones*

should see his whole life shredded from him and shrivel away like a dried shuck thrown onto the fire.

He ceased, became still. He heard the horses, suddenly and plainly; presently he saw the lantern and the movement of men, the glint of gun barrels, in its moving light. Yet he did not stir. It was quite dark now, and he listened to the voices and the sounds of underbrush as they surrounded the house. The lantern itself came on; its light fell upon the quiet body in the weeds and stopped, the horses tall and shadowy. A man descended and stooped in the lantern light, above the body. He held a pistol; he rose and faced the house. "Jones," he said.

"I'm here," Wash said quietly from the window. "That you, Major?"

"Come out."

"Sho," he said quietly. "I just want to see to my granddaughter."

"We'll see to her. Come on out."

"Sho, Major. Just a minute."

"Show a light. Light your lamp."

"Sho. In just a minute." They could hear his voice retreat into the house, though they could not see him as he went swiftly to the crack in the chimney where he kept the butcher knife: the one thing in his slovenly life and house in which he took pride, since it was razor sharp. He approached the pallet, his granddaughter's voice:

"Who is it? Light the lamp, grandpaw."

"Hit won't need no light, honey. Hit won't take but a minute," he said, kneeling, fumbling toward her voice, whispering now. "Where air you?"

"Right here," she said fretfully. "Where would I be? What is . . ." His hand touched her face. "What is . . . Grandpaw! Grand. . . ."

"Jones!" the sheriff said. "Come out of there!"

"In just a minute, Major," he said. Now he rose and moved swiftly. He knew where in the dark the can of kerosene was, just as he knew that it was full, since it was not two days ago that he had filled it at the store and held it there until he got a ride home with it, since the five gallons were heavy. There were still coals on the hearth; besides, the crazy building itself was like tinder: the coals, the hearth, the walls exploding in a single blue glare. Against it the waiting men saw him in a wild instant springing toward them with the lifted scythe before the horses reared and whirled. They checked the horses and turned them back toward the glare, yet still in wild relief against it the gaunt figure ran toward them with the lifted scythe.

"Jones!" the sheriff shouted; "stop! Stop, or I'll shoot. Jones! *Jones!*" Yet still the gaunt, furious figure came on against the glare and roar of the flames. With the scythe lifted, it bore down upon them, upon the wild glaring eyes of the horses and the swinging glints of gun barrels, without any cry, any sound.

I

I WALKED right through the anteroom without stopping. Miss West says, "He's in conference now," but I didn't stop. I didn't knock, either. They were talking and he quit and looked up across the desk at me.

"How much notice do you want to write me off?" I said.

"Write you off?" he said.

"I'm quitting," I said. "Will one day be notice enough?"

He looked at me, frog-eyed. "Isn't our car good enough for you to demonstrate?" he said. His hand lay on the desk, holding the cigar. He's got a ruby ring the size of a tail-light. "You've been with us three weeks," he says. "Not long enough to learn what that word on the door means."

He don't know it, but three weeks is pretty good; it's within two days of the record. And if three weeks is a record with him, he could have shaken hands with the new champion without moving.

The trouble is, I had never learned to do anything. You know how it was in those days, with even the college campuses full of British and French uniforms, and us all scared to death it would be over before we could get in and swank a pair of pilot's wings ourselves. And then to get in and find something that suited you right down to the ground, you see.

So after the Armistice I stayed in for a couple of years as

a test pilot. That was when I took up wing-walking, to relieve the monotony. A fellow named Waldrip and I used to hide out at about three thousand on a Nine while I muscled around on top of it. Because Army life is pretty dull in peacetime: nothing to do but lay around and lie your head off all day and play poker all night. And isolation is bad for poker. You lose on tick, and on tick you always plunge.

There was a fellow named White lost a thousand one night. He kept on losing and I wanted to quit but I was winner and he wanted to play on, plunging and losing every pot. He gave me a check and I told him it wasn't any rush, to forget it, because he had a wife out in California. Then the next night he wanted to play again. I tried to talk him out of it, but he got mad. Called me yellow. So he lost fifteen hundred more that night.

Then I said I'd cut him, double or quit, one time. He cut a queen. So I said, "Well, that beats me. I won't even cut." And I flipped his cut over and riffled them and we saw a gob of face cards and three of the aces. But he insisted, and I said, "What's the use? The percentage would be against me, even with a full deck." But he insisted. I cut the case ace. I would have paid to lose. I offered again to tear up the checks, but he sat there and cursed me. I left him sitting at the table, in his shirt sleeves and his collar open, looking at the ace.

The next day we had the job, the speed ship. I had done everything I could. I couldn't offer him the checks again. I will let a man who is worked up curse me once. But I won't let him twice. So we had the job, the speed ship. I wouldn't touch it. He took it up five thousand feet and dived the wings off at two thousand with a full gun.

So I was out again after four years, a civ again. And while I was still drifting around—that was when I first tried selling automobiles—I met Jack, and he told me about a bird that

wanted a wing-walker for his barn-storming circus. And that was how I met her.

II

JACK—he gave me a note to Rogers—told me about what a good pilot Rogers was, and about her, how they said she was unhappy with him.

“So is your old man,” I said.

“That’s what they say,” Jack said. So when I saw Rogers and handed him the note—he was one of these lean, quiet-looking birds—I said to myself he was just the kind that would marry one of these flighty, passionate, good-looking women they used to catch during the war with a set of wings, and have her run out on him the first chance. So I felt safe. I knew she’d not have had to wait any three years for one like me.

So I expected to find one of these long, dark, snake-like women surrounded by ostrich plumes and Woolworth incense, smoking cigarettes on the divan while Rogers ran out to the corner delicatessen for sliced ham and potato salad on paper plates. But I was wrong. She came in with an apron on over one of these little pale squashy dresses, with flour or something on her arms, without apologizing or flurrying around or anything. She said Howard—that was Rogers—had told her about me and I said, “What did he tell you?” But she just said:

“I expect you’ll find this pretty dull for spending the evening, having to help cook your own dinner. I imagine you’d rather go out to dance with a couple of bottles of gin.”

“Why do you think that?” I said. “Don’t I look like I could do anything else?”

“Oh, don’t you?” she said.

We had washed the dishes then and we were sitting in the

firelight, with the lights off, with her on a cushion on the floor, her back against Rogers' knees, smoking and talking, and she said, "I know you had a dull time. Howard suggested that we go out for dinner and to dance somewhere. But I told him you'd just have to take us as we are, first as well as later. Are you sorry?"

She could look about sixteen, especially in the apron. By that time she had bought one for me to wear, and the three of us would all go back to the kitchen and cook dinner. "We don't expect you to enjoy doing this any more than we do," she said. "It's because we are so poor. We're just an aviator."

"Well, Howard can fly well enough for two people," I said. "So that's all right, too."

"When he told me you were just a flyer too, I said, 'My Lord, a wing-walker? When you were choosing a family friend,' I said, 'why didn't you choose a man we could invite to dinner a week ahead and not only count on his being there, but on his taking us out and spending his money on us?' But he had to choose one that is as poor as we are." And once she said to Rogers: "We'll have to find Buck a girl, too. He's going to get tired of just us some day." You know how they say things like that: things that sound like they meant something until you look at them and find their eyes perfectly blank, until you wonder if they were even thinking about you, let alone talking about you.

Or maybe I'd have them out to dinner and a show. "Only I didn't mean that like it sounded," she said "That wasn't a hint to take us out."

"Did you mean that about getting me a girl too?" I said.

Then she looked at me with that wide, blank, innocent look. That was when I would take them by my place for a cocktail—Rogers didn't drink, himself—and when I would come in that night I'd find traces of powder on my dresser or maybe her handkerchief or something, and I'd go to bed

with the room smelling like she was still there. She said: "Do you want us to find you one?" But nothing more was ever said about it, and after a while, when there was a high step or any of those little things which men do for women that means touching them, she'd turn to me like it was me was her husband and not him; and one night a storm caught us downtown and we went to my place and she and Rogers slept in my bed and I slept in a chair in the sitting-room.

One evening I was dressing to go out there when the 'phone rang. It was Rogers. "I am—" he said, then something cut him off. It was like somebody had put a hand on his mouth, and I could hear them talking, murmuring: her, rather. "Well, what—" Rogers says. Then I could hear her breathing into the mouth-piece, and she said my name.

"Don't forget you're to come out to-night," she said.

"I hadn't," I said. "Or did I get the date wrong? If this is not the night—"

"You come on out," she said. "Goodbye."

When I got there he met me. His face looked like it always did, but I didn't go in. "Come on in," he said.

"Maybe I got the date wrong," I said. "So if you'll just—"

He swung the door back. "Come on in," he said.

She was lying on the divan, crying. I don't know what; something about money. "I just can't stick it," she said. "I've tried and I've tried, but I just can't stand it."

"You know what my insurance rates are," he said. "If something happened, where would you be?"

"Where am I, anyway? What tenement woman hasn't got more than I have?" She hadn't looked up, lying there on her face, with the apron twisted under her. "Why don't you quit and do something that you can get a decent insurance rate, like other men?"

"I must be getting along," I said. I didn't belong there. I just got out. He came down to the door with me, and then

we were both looking back up the stairs toward the door where she was lying on her face on the couch.

"I've got a little stake," I said. "I guess because I've eaten so much of your grub I haven't had time to spend it. So if it's anything urgent. . . ." We stood there, he holding the door open. "Of course, I wouldn't try to muscle in where I don't . . ."

"I wouldn't, if I were you," he said. He opened the door. "See you at the field tomorrow."

"Sure," I said. "See you at the field."

I didn't see her for almost a week, didn't hear from her. I saw him every day, and at last I said, "How's Mildred these days?"

"She's on a visit," he said. "At her mother's."

For the next two weeks I was with him every day. When I was out on top I'd look back at his face behind the goggles. But we never mentioned her name, until one day he told me she was home again and that I was invited out to dinner that night.

It was in the afternoon. He was busy all that day hopping passengers, so I was doing nothing, just killing time waiting for evening and thinking about her, wondering some, but mostly just thinking about her being home again, breathing the same smoke and soot I was breathing, when all of a sudden I decided to go out there. It was plain as a voice saying, "Go out there. Now, at once." So I went. I didn't even wait to change. She was alone, reading before the fire. It was like gasoline from a broken line blazing up around you.

III

IT WAS FUNNY. When I'd be out on top I'd look back at his face behind the windscreen, wondering what he knew. He must have known almost at once. Why, say, she didn't have

any discretion at all. She'd say and do things, you know: insist on sitting close to me; touching me in that different way from when you hold an umbrella or a raincoat over them, and such that any man can tell at one look, when she thought he might not see: not when she knew he couldn't, but when she thought *maybe* he wouldn't. And when I'd unfasten my belt and crawl out I'd look back at his face and wonder what he was thinking, how much he knew or suspected.

I'd go out there in the afternoon when he was busy. I'd stall around until I saw that he would be lined up for the rest of the day, then I'd give some excuse and beat it. One afternoon I was all ready to go, waiting for him to take off, when he cut the gun and leaned out and beckoned me. "Don't go off," he said. "I want to see you."

So I knew he knew then, and I waited until he made the last hop and was taking off his monkey suit in the office. He looked at me and I looked at him. "Come out to dinner," he said.

When I came in they were waiting. She had on one of those little squashy dresses and she came and put her arms around me and kissed me with him watching.

"I'm going with you," she said. "We've talked it over and have both agreed that we couldn't love one another any more after this and that this is the only sensible thing to do. Then he can find a woman he can love, a woman that's not bad like I am."

He was looking at me, and she running her hands over my face and making a little moaning sound against my neck, and me like a stone or something. Do you know what I was thinking? I wasn't thinking about her at all. I was thinking that he and I were upstairs and me out on top and I had just found that he had thrown the stick away and was flying her on the rudder alone and that he knew that I knew the stick

was gone and so it was all-right now, whatever happened. So it was like a piece of wood with another piece of wood leaning against it, and she held back and looked at my face.

"Don't you love me any more?" she said, watching my face. "If you love me, say so. I have told him everything."

I wanted to be out of there. I wanted to run. I wasn't scared. It was because it was all kind of hot and dirty. I wanted to be away from her a little while, for Rogers and me to be out where it was cold and hard and quiet, to settle things.

"What do you want to do?" I said. "Will you give her a divorce?"

She was watching my face very closely. Then she let me go and she ran to the mantel and put her face into the bend of her arm, crying.

"You were lying to me," she said. "You didn't mean what you said. Oh God, what have I done?"

You know how it is. Like there is a right time for everything. Like nobody is anything in himself: like a woman, even when you love her, is a woman to you just a part of the time and the rest of the time she is just a person that don't look at things the same way a man has learned to. Don't have the same ideas about what is decent and what is not. So I went over and stood with my arms about her, thinking, "God damn it, if you'll just keep out of this for a little while! We're both trying our best to take care of you, so it won't hurt you."

Because I loved her, you see. Nothing can marry two people closer than a mutual sin in the world's eyes. And he had had his chance. If it had been me that knew her first and married her and he had been me, I would have had my chance. But it was him that had had it, so when she said, "Then say what you tell me when we are alone. I tell you I have told him everything," I said.

"Everything? Have you told him everything?" He was watching us. "Has she told you everything?" I said.

"It doesn't matter," he said. "Do you want her?" Then before I could speak, he said: "Do you love her? Will you be good to her?"

His face was gray-looking, like when you see a man again after a long time and you say, "Good God, is that Rogers?" When I finally got away the divorce was all settled.

IV

SO THE NEXT MORNING when I reached the field, Harris, the man who owned the flying circus, told me about the special job; I had forgotten it, I suppose. Anyway, he said he had told me about it. Finally I said I wouldn't fly with Rogers.

"Why not?" Harris said.

"Ask him," I said.

"If he agrees to fly you, will you go up?"

So I said yes. And then Rogers came out; he said that he would fly me. And so I believed that he had known about the job all the time and had laid for me, sucked me in. We waited until Harris went out. "So this is why you were so mealy-mouthed last night," I said. I cursed him. "You've got me now, haven't you?"

"Take the stick yourself," he said. "I'll do your trick."

"Have you ever done any work like this before?"

"No. But I can, as long as you fly her properly."

I cursed him. "You feel good," I said. "You've got me. Come on; grin on the outside of your face. Come on!"

He turned and went to the crate and began to get into the front seat. I went and caught his shoulder and jerked him back. We looked at one another.

"I won't hit you now," he said, "if that's what you want. Wait till we get down again."

"No," I said. "Because I want to hit back once."

We looked at one another; Harris was watching us from the office.

"All right," Rogers said. "Let me have your shoes, will you? I haven't got any rubber soles out here."

"Take your seat," I said. "What the hell does it matter? I guess I'd do the same thing in your place."

The job was over an amusement park, a carnival. There must have been twenty-five thousand of them down there, like colored ants. I took chances that day that I had never taken, chances you can't see from the ground. But every time the ship was right under me, balancing me against side pressure and all, like he and I were using the same mind. I thought he was playing with me, you see. I'd look back at his face, yelling at him: "Come on; now you've got me. Where are your guts?"

I was a little crazy, I guess. Anyway, when I think of the two of us up there, yelling back and forth at one another, and all the little bugs watching and waiting for the big show, the loop. He could hear me, but I couldn't hear him; I could just see his lips moving. "Come on," I'd yell; "shake the wing a little; I'll go off easy, see?"

I was a little crazy. You know how it is, how you want to rush into something you know is going to happen, no matter what it is. I guess lovers and suicides both know that feeling. I'd yell back at him: "You want it to look all right, eh? And to lose me off the level ship wouldn't look so good, would it? All right," I yelled, "let's go." I went back to the center section and cast the rope loose where it loops around the forward jury struts and I got set against it and looked back at him and gave him the signal. I was a little crazy. I was still yelling at him; I don't know what I was yelling. I thought maybe I had already fallen off and was dead and didn't know it. The wires began to whine and I was looking straight down

at the ground and the little colored dots. Then the wires were whistling proper and he gunned her and the ground began to slide back under the nose. I waited until it was gone and the horizon had slid back under too and I couldn't see anything but sky. Then I let go one end of the rope and jerked it out and threw it back at his head and held my arms out as she zoomed into the loop.

I wasn't trying to kill myself. I wasn't thinking about myself. I was thinking about him. Trying to show him up like he had shown me up. Give him something he must fail at like he had given me something I failed at. I was trying to break him.

We were over the loop before he lost me. The ground had come back, with the little colored dots, and then the pressure went off my soles and I was falling. I made a half somersault and was just going into the first turn of a flat spin, with my face to the sky, when something banged me in the back. It knocked the wind out of me, and for a second I must have been completely out. Then I opened my eyes and I was lying on my back on the top wing, with my head hanging over the back edge.

I was too far down the slope of the camber to bend my knees over the leading edge, and I could feel the wing creeping under me. I didn't dare move. I knew that if I tried to sit up against the slip stream, I would go off backward. I could see by the tail and the horizon that we were upside now, in a shallow dive, and I could see Rogers standing up in his cockpit, unfastening his belt, and I could turn my head a little more and see that when I went off I would miss the fuselage altogether, or maybe hit it with my shoulder.

So I lay there with the wing creeping under me, feeling my shoulders beginning to hang over space, counting my backbones as they crept over the edge, watching Rogers crawl forward along the fuselage, toward the front seat. I

watched him for a long time, inching himself along against the pressure, his trouser-legs whipping. After a while I saw his legs slide into the front cockpit and then I felt his hands on me.

There was a fellow in my squadron. I didn't like him and he hated my guts. All right. One day he got me out of a tight jam when I was caught ten miles over the lines with a blowing valve. When we were down he said, "Don't think I was just digging you out. I was getting'a Hun, and I got him." He cursed me, with his goggles cocked up and his hands on his hips, cursing me like he was smiling. But that's all right. You're each on a Camel; if you go out, that's too bad; if he goes out, it's just too bad. Not like when you're on the center section and he's at the stick, and just by stalling her for a second or ruddering her a little at the top of the loop.

But I was yeung, then. Good Lord, I used to be young! I remember Armistice night in '18, and me chasing all over Amiens with a lousy prisoner we had brought down that morning on an Albatross, trying to keep the frog M.P.'s from getting him. He was a good guy, and those damned infantrymen wanting to stick him in a pen full of S. O. S. and ginned-up cooks and such. I felt sorry for the bastard, being so far from home and licked and all. I was sure young.

We were all young. I remember an Indian, a prince, an Oxford man, with his turban and his trick major's pips, that said we were all dead that fought in the war. "You will not know it," he said, "but you are all dead. With this difference: those out there"—jerking his arm toward where the front was—"do not care, and you do not know it." And something else he said, about breathing for a long time yet, some kind of walking funerals; catafalques and tombs and epitaphs of men that died on the fourth of August, 1914, without knowing that they had died, he said. He was a card, queer. A good little guy, too.

But I wasn't quite dead while I was lying on the top wing of that Standard and counting my backbones as they crawled over the edge like a string of ants, until Rogers grabbed me. And when he came to the station that night to say goodbye, he brought me a letter from her, the first I ever had. The handwriting looked exactly like her; I could almost smell the scent she used and feel her hands touching me. I tore it in two without opening it and threw the pieces down. But he picked them up and gave them back to me. "Don't be a fool," he said.

And that's all. They've got a kid now, a boy of six. Rogers wrote me; about six months afterward the letter caught up with me. I'm his godfather. Funny to have a godfather that's never seen you and that you'll never see, isn't it?

V

So I SAID TO REINHARDT: "Will one day be enough notice?"

"One minute will be enough," he said. He pressed the buzzer. Miss West came in. She is a good kid. Now and then, when I'd just have to blow off some steam, she and I would have lunch at the dairy place across the street, and I could tell her about them, about the women. They are the worst. You know; you get a call for a demonstration, and there'll be a whole car full of them waiting on the porch and we'd pile in and all go shopping. Me dodging around in the traffic, hunting a place to park, and her saying, "John insisted that I try this car. But what I tell him, it's foolish to buy a car that is as difficult to find parking space for as this one appears to be."

And them watching the back of my head with that bright, hard, suspicious way. God knows what they thought we had; maybe one that would fold up like a deck chair and lean against a fire plug. But hell, I couldn't sell hair straightener to the widow of a nigger railroad accident.

So Miss West comes in; she is a good kid, only somebody told her I had had three or four other jobs in a year without sticking, and that I used to be a war pilot, and she'd keep on after me about why I quit flying and why I didn't go back to it, now that crates were more general, since I wasn't much good at selling automobiles or at anything else, like women will. You know: urgent and sympathetic, and you can't shut them up like you could a man; she came in and Reinhardt says, "We are letting Mr. Monaghan go: Send him to the cashier."

"Don't bother," I said. "Keep it to buy yourself 'a hoop with."

Dr. Martino

HUBERT JARROD met Louise King at a Christmas house party in Saint Louis. He had stopped there on his way home to Oklahoma to oblige, with his aura of oil wells and Yale, the sister of a classmate. Or so he told himself, or so he perhaps believed. He had planned to stop off at Saint Louis two days and he stayed out the full week, going on to Tulsa overnight to spend Christmas Day with his mother and then returning, "to play around a little more with my swamp angel," he told himself. He thought about her quite a lot on the return train—a thin, tense, dark girl. "That to come out of Mississippi," he thought. "Because she's got it: a kid born and bred in a Mississippi swamp." He did not mean sex appeal. He could not have been fooled by that alone, who had been three years now at New Haven, belonging to the right clubs and all and with money to spend. And besides, Louise was a little on the epicene. What he meant was a quality of which he was not yet consciously aware: a beyond-looking, a passionate sense for and belief in immanent change to which the rhinoceroslike sufficiency of his Yale and oil-well veneer was a little impervious at first. All he remarked at first was the expectation, the seeking, which he immediately took to himself.

Apparently he was not wrong. He saw her first across the dinner-table. They had not yet been introduced, yet ten

minutes after they left the table she had spoken to him, and ten minutes after that they had slipped out of the house and were in a taxi, and she had supplied the address.

He could not have told himself how it happened, for all his practice, his experience in surreptitiousness. Perhaps he was too busy looking at her; perhaps he was just beginning to be aware that the beyond-looking, the tense expectation, was also beyond him—his youth, his looks, the oil wells and Yale. Because the address she had given was not toward any lights or music apparently, and she sitting beside him, furred and shapeless, her breath vaporizing faster than if she had been trying to bring to life a dead cigarette. He watched the dark houses, the dark, mean streets. "Where are we going?" he said.

She didn't answer, didn't look at him, sitting a little forward on the seat. "Mamma didn't want to come," she said.

"Your mother?"

"She's with me. Back there at the party. You haven't met her yet."

"Oh. So that's what you are slipping away from. I flattered myself. I thought I was the reason." She was sitting forward, small, tense, watching the dark houses: a district half dwellings and half small shops. "Your mother won't let him come to call on you?"

She didn't answer, but leaned forward. Suddenly she tapped on the glass. "Here, driver!" she said. "Right here." The cab stopped. She turned to face Jarrod, who sat back in his corner, muffled, his face cold. "I'm sorry. I know it's a rotten trick. But I had to."

"Not at all," Jarrod said. "Don't mention it."

"I know it's rotten. But I just had to. If you just understood."

"Sure," Jarrod said. "Do you want me to come back and get you? I'd better not go back to the party alone."

"You come in with me."

"Come in?"

"Yes. It'll be all right. I know you can't understand. But it'll be all right. You come in too."

He looked at her face. "I believe you really mean it," he said. "I guess not. But I won't let you down. You set a time, and I'll come back."

"Don't you trust me?"

"Why should I? It's no business of mine. I never saw you before, to-night. I'm glad to oblige you. Too bad I am leaving to-morrow. But I guess you can find somebody else to use. You go on in; I'll come back for you."

He left her there and returned in two hours. She must have been waiting just inside the door, because the cab had hardly stopped before the door opened and she ran down the steps and sprang into the cab before he could dismount. "Thank you," she said. "Thank you. You were kind. You were so kind."

When the cab stopped beneath the porte-cochère of the house from which music now came, neither of them moved at once. Neither of them made the first move at all, yet a moment later they kissed. Her mouth was still, cold. "I like you," she said. "I do like you."

Before the week was out Jarrod offered to serve her again so, but she refused, quietly. "Why?" he said. "Don't you want to see him again?" But she wouldn't say, and he had met Mrs. King by that time and he said to himself, "The old girl is after me, anyway." He saw that at once; he took that also as the meed due his oil wells and his Yale nimbus, since three years at New Haven, leading no classes and winning no football games, had done nothing to dispossess him of the belief that he was the natural prey of all mothers of daughters. But he didn't flee, not even after he found, a few evenings later, Louise again unaccountably absent, and knew

that she had gone, using someone else for the stalking horse, to that quiet house in the dingy street. "Well, I'm done," he said to himself. "I'm through now." But still he didn't flee, perhaps because she had used someone else this time. "She cares that much, anyway," he said to himself.

When he returned to New Haven he had Louise's promise to come to the spring prom. He knew now that Mrs. King would come too. He didn't mind that; one day he suddenly realized that he was glad. Then he knew that it was because he too knew, believed, that Louise needed looking after; that he had already surrendered unconditionally to one woman of them, he who had never once mentioned love to himself, to any woman. He remembered that quality of beyond-looking and that dark, dingy house in Saint Louis, and he thought, "Well, we have her. We have the old woman." And one day he believed that he had found the reason if not the answer. It was in class, in psychology, and he found himself sitting bolt upright, looking at the instructor. The instructor was talking about women, about young girls in particular, about that strange, mysterious phase in which they live for a while. "A blind spot, like that which racing aviators enter when making a fast turn. When what they see is neither good nor evil, and so what they do is likely to be either one. Probably more likely to be evil, since the very evilness of evil stems from its own fact, while good is an absence of fact. A time, an hour, in which they themselves are victims of that by means of which they victimize."

That night he sat before his fire for some time, not studying, not doing anything. "We've got to be married soon," he said. "Soon."

Mrs. King and Louise arrived for the prom. Mrs. King was a gray woman, with a cold, severe face, not harsh, but watchful, alert. It was as though Jafrod saw Louise, too, for the first time. Until then he had not been aware that he was

conscious of the beyond-looking quality. It was only now that he saw it by realizing how it had become tenser, as though it were now both dread and desire; as though with the approach of summer she were approaching a climax, a crisis. So he thought that she was ill.

"Maybe we ought to be married right away," he said to Mrs. King. "I don't want a degree, anyway." They were allies now, not yet antagonists, though he had not told her of the two Saint Louis expeditions, the one he knew of and the one he suspected. It was as though he did not need to tell her. It was as though he knew that she knew: that she knew he knew she knew.

"Yes," she said. "At once."

But that was as far as it got, though when Louise and Mrs. King left New Haven, Louise had his ring. But it was not on her hand, and on her face was that strained, secret, beyond-looking expression which he now knew was beyond him too, and the effigy and shape which the oil wells and Yale had made. "Till July, then," he said.

"Yes," she said. "I'll write. I'll write you when to come."

And that was all. He went back to his clubs, his classes; in psychology especially he listened. "It seems I'm going to need psychology," he thought, thinking of the dark, small house in Saint Louis, the blank, dark door through which, running, she had disappeared. That was it: a man he had never seen, never heard of, shut up in a little dingy house on a back street on Christmas eve. He thought, fretfully, "And me young, with money, a Yale man. And I don't even know his name."

Once a week he wrote to Louise; perhaps twice a month he received replies—brief, cold notes mailed always at a different place—resorts and hotels—until mid-June, within a week of Commencement and his degree. Then he received a wire. It was from Mrs. King. It said *Come at once* and the

location was Cranston's Wells, Mississippi. It was a town he had never heard of.

That was Friday; thirty minutes later his roommate came in and found him packing. "Going to town?" the roommate said.

"Yes," Jarrod said.

"I'll go with you. I need a little relaxation myself, before facing the cheering throngs at the Dean's altar."

"No," Jarrod said. "This is business."

"Sure," the roommate said. "I know a business woman in New York, myself. There's more than one in that town."

"No," Jarrod said. "Not this time."

"Beano," the roommate said.

The place was a resort owned by a neat, small, gray spinster who had inherited it, and some of the guests as well from her father thirty years ago—a rambling frame hotel and a housed spring where old men with pouched eyes and parchment skin and old women dropsical with good living gathered from the neighboring Alabama and Mississippi towns to drink the iron-impregnated waters. This was the place where Louise had been spending her summers since she was born; and from the veranda of the hotel where the idle old women with their idle magazines and embroidery and their bright shawls had been watching each summer the comedy of which he was just learning, he could see the tips of the crepe myrtle copse hiding the bench on which the man whom he had come to fear, and whose face he had not even seen, had been sitting all day long for three months each summer for more than fifteen years.

So he stood beside the neat, gray proprietress on the top step in the early sunlight, while the old women went to and fro between house and spring, watching him with covert, secret, bright, curious looks. "Watching Louise's young

man compete with a dead man and a horse," Jarrod thought.

But his face did not show this. It showed nothing at all, not even a great deal of intelligence as, tall, erect, in flannels and a tweed jacket in the Mississippi June, where the other men wore linen when they wore coats at all, he talked with the proprietress about the man whose face he had not seen and whose name he had just learned.

"It's his heart," the proprietress said to Jarrod. "He has to be careful. He had to give up his practice and everything. He hasn't any people and he has just enough money to come down here every summer and spend the summer sitting on his bench; we call it Doctor Martino's bench. Each summer I think it will be the last time; that we shan't see him again. But each May I get the message from him, the reservation. And do you know what I think? I think that it is Louise King that keeps him alive. And that Alvina Kirg is a fool."

"How a fool?" Jarrod said.

The proprietress was watching him—this was the morning after his arrival; looking down at her he thought at first, "She is wondering how much I have heard. how much they have told me." Then he thought, "No. It's because she stays busy. Not like them, those others with their magazines. She has to stay too busy keeping them fed to have learned who I am, or to have been thinking all this time what the others have been thinking."

She was watching him. "How long have you known Louise?"

"Not long. I met her at a dance at school."

"Oh. Well, I think that the Lord has taken pity on Doctor Martino and He is letting him use Louise's heart, somehow. That's what I think. And you can laugh if you want to."

"I'm not laughing," Jarrod said. "Tell me about him."

She told him, watching his face, her air bright, birdlike, telling him about how the man had appeared one June, in

his crumpled linen and panama hat, and about his eyes. ("They looked like shoe-buttons. And when he moved it was as slow as if he had to keep on telling himself, even after he had started moving, 'Go on, now; keep on moving, now.'") And about how he signed the book in script almost too small to read: Jules Martino, Saint Louis, Missouri. And how after that year he came back each June, to sit all day long on the bench in the crepe myrtle copse, where the old Negro porter would fetch him his mail: the two medical journals, the Saint Louis paper, and the two letters from Louise King—the one in June saying that she would arrive next week, and the one in late August saying that she had reached home. But the proprietress didn't tell how she would walk a little way down the path three or four times a day to see if he were all right, and he not aware of it; and watching her while she talked, Jarrod thought, "What rivers has he made *you* swim, I wonder?"

"He had been coming here for three years," the proprietress said, "without knowing anybody, without seeming to want to know anybody, before even I found out about his heart. But he kept on coming (I forgot to say that Alvina King was already spending the summer here, right after Louise was born) and then I noticed how he would always be sitting where he could watch Louise playing, and so I thought that maybe he had lost his child. That was before he told me that he had never married and he didn't have any family at all. I thought that was what attracted him to Louise. And so I would watch him while he watched Louise growing up. I would see them talking, and him watching her year after year, and so after a while I said to myself. 'He wants to be married. He's waiting for Louise to grow up.' That's what I thought then." The proprietress was not looking at Jarrod now. She laughed a little. "My Lord, I've thought a lot of foolishness in my time."

"I don't know that that was so foolish," Jarrod said.

"Maybe not. Louise would make anybody a wife to be proud of. And him being all alone, without anybody to look after him when he got old." The proprietress was beyond fifty herself. "I reckon I've passed the time when I believe it's important whether women get married or not. I reckon, running this place single-handed this way, I've come to believe it ain't very important what anybody does, as long as they are fed 'good and have a comfortable bed." She ceased. For a time she seemed to muse upon the shade-dappled park, the old women clotting within the marquee above the spring.

"Did he make her do things, then?" Jarrod said.

"You've been listening to Alvina King," the proprietress said. "He never made her do anything. How could he? He never left that bench. He never leaves it. He would just sit there and watch her playing, until she began to get too old to play in the dirt. Then they would talk, sitting on the bench there. How could he make her do things, even if he had wanted to?"

"I think you are right," Jarrod said. "Tell me about when she swam the river."

"Oh, yes. She was always afraid of water. But one summer she learned to swim, learned by herself, in the pool. He wasn't even there. Nor at the river either. He didn't know about that until we knew it. He just told her not to be afraid, ever. And what's the harm in that, will you tell me?"

"None," Jarrod said.

"No," the proprietress said, as though she were not listening, had not heard him. "So she came in and told me, and I said, 'With the snakes and all, weren't you afraid?' And she said:

" 'Yes. I was afraid. That's why I did it.' "

" 'Why you did it?' I said. And she said:

" 'When you are afraid to do something you know that you are alive. But when you are afraid to do what you are afraid of you are dead.'

" 'I know where you got that,' I said. 'I'll be bound he didn't swim the river too.' And she said:

" 'He didn't have to. Every time he wakes up in the morning he does what I had to swim the river to do. This is what I got for doing it: see?' And she took something on a string out of the front of her dress and showed it to me. It was a rabbit made out of metal or something, about an inch tall, like you buy in the ten-cent stores. He had given it to her.

" 'What does that mean?' I said.

" 'That's my being afraid,' she said. 'A rabbit: don't you see? But it's brass now; the shape of being afraid, in brass that nothing can hurt. As long as I keep it I am not even afraid of being afraid.'

" 'And if you are afraid,' I said, 'then what?'

" 'Then I'll give it back to him,' she said. And what's the harm in that, pray tell me? even though Alvina King always has been a fool. Because Louise came back in about an hour. She had been crying. She had the rabbit in her hand. 'Will you keep this for me?' she said. 'Don't let anybody have it except me. Not anybody. Will you promise?'

" 'And I promised, and I put the rabbit away for her. She asked me for it just before they left. That was when Alvina said they were not coming back the next summer. 'This foolishness is going to end,' she said. 'He will get her killed; he is a menace.'

" 'And, sure enough, next summer they didn't come. I heard that Louise was sick, and I knew why. I knew that Alvina had driven her into sickness, into bed. But Doctor Jules came in June. 'Louise has been right sick,' I told him.

" 'Yes,' he said; 'I know.' So I thought he had heard, that she had written to him. But then I thought how she must

have been too sick to write, and that that fool mother of hers anyway . . ." The proprietress was watching Jarrod. "Because she wouldn't have to write him."

"Wouldn't have to?"

"He knew she was sick. He knew it. She didn't have to write him. Now you'll laugh."

"I'm not laughing. How did he know?"

"He knew. Because I knew he knew; and so when he didn't go on back to Saint Louis, I knew that she would come. And so in August they did come. Louise had grown a lot taller, thinner, and that afternoon I saw them standing together for the first time. She was almost as tall as he was. That was when I first saw that Louise was a woman. And now I'm worrying about that horse that Louise says she's going to ride."

"It's already killed one man," Jarrod said.

"Automobiles have killed more than that. But you ride in an automobile, yourself. You came in one. It never hurt her when she swam that river, did it?"

"But this is different. How do you know it won't hurt her?"

"I just know."

"How know?"

"You go out there where you can see that bench. Don't bother him; just go and look at him. Then you'll know too."

"Well, I'd want a little more assurance than that," Jarrod said.

He had returned to Mrs. King. With Louise he had had one interview, brief, violent, bitter. That was the night before; to-day she had disappeared. "Yet he is still sitting there on that bench," Jarrod thought. "She's not even with him. They don't even seem to have to be together: he can tell all the way from Mississippi to Saint Louis when she is sick. Well, I know who's in the blind spot now."

Mrs. King was in her room. "It seems that my worst competitor is that horse," Jarrod said.

"Can't you see he is making her ride it for the same reason he made her swim that snake-filled river? To show that he can, to humiliate me?"

"What can I do?" Jarrod said. "I tried to talk to her last night. But you saw where I got."

"If I were a man, I shouldn't have to ask what to do. If I saw the girl I was engaged to being ruined, ruined by a man, any man, and a man I never saw before and don't even know who he is—old or not old; heart or no heart . . ."

"I'll talk to her again."

"Talk?" Mrs. King said. "Talk? Do you think I sent you that message to hurry down here just to talk to her?"

"You wait, now," Jarrod said. "It'll be all right. I'll attend to this."

He had to do a good bit of waiting, himself. It was nearly noon when Louise entered the empty lobby where he sat. He rose. "Well?"

They looked at each other. "Well?"

"Are you still going to ride that horse this afternoon?" Jarrod asked.

"I thought we settled this last night. But you're still meddling. I didn't send for you to come down here."

"But I'm here. I never thought, though, that I was being sent for to compete with a horse." She watched him, her eyes hard. "With worse than a horse. With a damned dead man. A man that's been dead for twenty years; he says so himself, they tell me. And he ought to know, being a doctor, a heart specialist. I suppose you keep him alive by scaring him—like strychnine, Florence Nightingale." She watched him, her face quite still, quite cold. "I'm not jealous," he went on. "Not of that bird. But when I see him making you ride that horse that has already killed . . ." He looked down

at her cold face. "Don't you want to marry me, Louise?"

She ceased to look at him. "It's because we are young yet. We have so much time, all the rest of time. And maybe next year even, this very day next year, with everything pretty and warm and green, and he will be . . . You don't understand. I didn't at first, when he first told me how it was to live day after day with a match box full of dynamite caps in your breast pocket. Then he told me one day, when I was big enough to understand, how there is nothing in the world but living, being alive, knowing you are alive. And to be afraid is to know you are alive, but to do what you are afraid of, then you *live*. He says it's better even to be afraid than to be dead. He told me all that while he was still afraid, before he gave up the being afraid and he knew he was alive without living. And now he has even given that up, and now he is just afraid. So what can I do?"

"Yes. And I can wait, because I haven't got a match box of dynamite caps in my shirt. Or a box of conjuring powder, either."

"I don't expect you to see. I didn't send for you. I didn't want to get you mixed up in it."

"You never thought of that when you took my ring. Besides, you had already got me mixed up in it, the first night I ever saw you. You never minded then. So now I know a lot I didn't know before. And what does he think about that ring, by the way?" She didn't answer. She was not looking at him; neither was her face averted. After a time he said, "I see. He doesn't know about the ring. You never showed it to him." Still she didn't answer, looking neither at him nor away. "All right," he said "I'll give you one more chance."

She looked at him. "One more chance for what?" Then she said, "Oh. The ring. You want it back." He watched her, erect, expressionless, while she drew from inside her

dress a slender cord on which was suspended the ring and a second object which he recognized in the flicking movement which broke the cord, to be the tiny metal rabbit of which the proprietress had told him. Then it was gone, and her hand flicked again, and something struck him a hard, stinging blow on the cheek. She was already running toward the stairs. After a time he stooped and picked up the ring from the floor. He looked about the lobby. "They're all down at the spring," he thought, holding the ring on his palm. "That's what people come here for: to drink water."

They were there, clotting in the marquee above the well, with their bright shawls and magazines. As he approached, Mrs. King came quickly out of the group, carrying one of the stained tumblers in her hand. "Yes?" she said. "Yes?" Jarrod extended his hand on which the ring lay. Mrs. King looked down at the ring, her face cold, quiet, outraged. "Sometimes I wonder if she can be my daughter. What will you do now?"

Jarrod, too, looked down at the ring, his face also cold, still. "At first I thought I just had to compete with a horse," he said. "But it seems there is more going on here than I knew of, than I was told of."

"Fiddlesticks," Mrs. King said. "Have you been listening to that fool Lily Cranston, to these other old fools here?"

"Not to learn any more than everybody else seems to have known all the time. But then, I'm only the man she was engaged to marry." He looked down at the ring. "What do you think I had better do now?"

"If you're a man that has to stop to ask advice from a woman in a case like this, then you'd better take the advice and take your ring and go on back to Nebraska or Kansas or wherever it is."

"Oklahoma," Jarrod said sullenly. He closed his hand on the ring. "He'll be on that bench," he said.

"Why shouldn't he?" Mrs. King said. "He has no one to fear here."

But Jarrod was already moving away. "You go on to Louise," he said. "I'll attend to this."

Mrs. King watched him go on down the path. Then she turned herself and flung the stained tumbler into an oleander bush and went to the hotel, walking fast, and mounted the stairs. Louise was in her room, dressing. "So you gave Hubert back his ring," Mrs. King said. "That man will be pleased now. You will have no secret from him now, if the ring ever was a secret. Since you don't seem to have any private affairs where he is concerned; don't appear to desire any—"

"Stop," Louise said. "You can't talk to me like that."

"Ah. He would be proud of that, too, to have heard that from his pupil."

"He wouldn't let me down. But you let me down. He wouldn't let me down." She stood thin and taut, her hands clenched at her sides. Suddenly she began to cry, her face lifted, the tears rolling down her cheeks. "I worry and I worry and I don't know what to do. And now you let me down, my own mother."

Mrs. King sat on the bed. Louise stood in her underthings, the garments she had removed scattered here and there, on the bed and on the chairs. On the table beside the bed lay the little metal rabbit; Mrs. King looked at it for a moment. "Don't you want to marry Hubert?" she said.

"Didn't I promise him, you and him both? Didn't I take his ring? But you won't let me alone. He won't give me time, a chance. And now you let me down, too. Everybody lets me down except Doctor Jules."

Mrs. King watched her, cold, immobile. "I believe that fool Lily Cranston is tight. I believe that man has some criminal power over you. I just thank God he has not used

it for anything except to try to make you kill yourself, make a fool of yourself. Not yet, that is—"

"Stop," Louise said; "stop!" She continued to say "Stop. Stop," even when Mrs. King walked up and touched her. "But you let me down! And now Hubert has let me down. He told you about that horse after he had promised me he wouldn't."

"I knew that already. That's why I sent for him. I could do nothing with you. Besides, it's anybody's business to keep you from riding it."

"You can't keep me. You may keep me locked up in this room to-day, but you can't always. Because you are older than I am. You'll have to die first, even if it takes a hundred years. And I'll come back and ride that horse if it takes a thousand years."

"Maybe I won't be here then," Mrs. King said. "But neither will he. I can outlive him. And I can keep you locked up in this room for one day, anyway."

Fifteen minutes later the ancient porter knocked at the locked door. Mrs. King went and opened it. "Mr. Jarrod wants to see you downstairs," the porter said.

She locked the door behind her. Jarrod was in the lobby. It was empty. "Yes?" Mrs. King said. "Yes?"

"He said that if Louise would tell him herself she wants to marry me. Send him a sign."

"A sign?" They both spoke quietly, a little tensely, though quite calm, quite grave.

"Yes. I showed him the ring, and him sitting there on that bench, in that suit looking like he had been sleeping in it all summer, and his eyes watching me like he didn't believe she had ever seen the ring. Then he said, 'Ah. You have the ring. Your proof seems to be in the hands of the wrong party. If you and Louise are engaged, she should have the ring. Or am I just old fashioned?' And me standing

there like a fool and him looking at the ring like it might have come from Woolworth's. He never even offered to touch it."

"You showed him the ring? The *ring*? You fool. What—"

"Yes. I don't know. It was just the way he sat there, the way he makes her do things, I guess. It was like he was laughing at me, like he knew all the time there was nothing I could do, nothing I could think of doing about it he had not already thought about; that he knew he could always get between us before—in time. . . ."

"Then what? What kind of a sign did he say?"

"He didn't say. He just said a sign, from her hand to his. That he could believe, since my having the ring had exploded my proof. And then I caught my hand just before it hit him—and him sitting there. He didn't move; he just sat there with his eyes closed and the sweat popping out on his face. And then he opened his eyes and said, 'Now, strike me.'"

"Wait," Mrs. King said. Jarrod had not moved. Mrs. King gazed across the empty lobby, tapping her teeth with her fingernail. "Proof," she said. "A sign." She moved. "You wait here." She went back up the stairs; a heavy woman, moving with that indomitable, locomotivelike celerity. She was not gone long. "Louise is asleep," she said, for no reason that Jarrod could have discerned, even if he had been listening. She held her closed hand out. "Can you have your car ready in twenty minutes?"

"Yes. But what—?"

"And your bags packed. I'll see to everything else."

"And Louise— You mean—"

"You can be married in Meridian; you will be there in an hour."

"Married? Has Louise—?"

"I have a sign from her that he will believe. You get your

things all ready and don't you tell anyone where you are going, do you hear?"

"Yes. Yes. And Louise has—?"

"Not a soul. Here"—she put something into his hand. "Get your things ready, then take this and give it to him. He may insist on seeing her. But I'll attend to that. You just be ready. Maybe he'll just write a note, anyway. You do what I told you." She turned back toward the stairs, fast, with that controlled swiftness, and disappeared. Then Jarrod opened his hand and looked at the object which she had given him. It was the metal rabbit. It had been gilded once, but that was years ago, and it now lay on his palm in mute and tarnished oxidation. When he left the room he was not exactly running either. But he was going fast.

But when he re-entered the lobby fifteen minutes later, he was running. Mrs. King was waiting for him.

"He wrote the note," Jarrod said. "One to Louise, and one to leave here for Miss Cranston. He told me I could read the one to Louise." But Mrs. King had already taken it from his hand and opened it. "He said I could read it," Jarrod said. He was breathing hard, fast. "He watched me do it, sitting there on that bench; he hadn't moved even his hands since I was there before, and then he said, 'Young Mr. Jarrod, you have been conquered by a woman, as I have been. But with this difference: it will be a long time yet before you will realize that you have been slain.' And I said, 'If Louise is to do the slaying, I intend to die every day for the rest of my life or hers.' And he said, 'Ah; Louise. Were you speaking of Louise?' And I said, 'Dead.' I said, 'Dead.' I said, 'Dead.'"

But Mrs. King was not there. She was already half way up the stairs. She entered the room. Louise turned at the bed, her face swollen, with tears or with sleep. Mrs. King handed her the note. "There, honey, What did I tell you? He was

just making a fool of you. Just using you to pass the time with."

The car was going fast when it turned into the highroad. "Hurry," Louise said. The car increased speed; she looked back once toward the hotel, the park massed with oleander and crepe myrtle, then she crouched still lower in the seat beside Jarrod. "Faster," she said.

"I say faster, too," Jarrod said. He glanced down at her; then he looked down at her again. She was crying. "Are you that glad?" he said.

"I've lost something," she said, crying quietly. "Something I've had a long time, given to me when I was a child. And now I've lost it. I had it just this morning, and now I can't find it."

"Lost it?" he said. "Given to you . . ." His foot lifted; the car began to slow. "Why, you sent . . ."

"No, no!" Louise said. "Don't stop! Don't turn back! Go on!"

The car was coasting now, slowing, the brakes not yet on. "Why, you . . . She said you were asleep." He put his foot on the brakes.

"No, no!" Louise cried. She had been sitting forward; she did not seem to have heard him at all. "Don't turn back! Go on! Go on!"

"And he knew," Jarrod thought. "Sitting there on the bench, he knew. When he said what he said that I would not know that I had been slain."

The car was almost stopped. "Go on!" Louise cried. "Go on!" He was looking down at her. Her eyes looked as if they were blind; her face was pale, white, her mouth open, shaped to an agony of despair and a surrender in particular which, had he been older, he would have realized that he would never see again on any face. Then he watched his hand set the lever back into gear, and his foot come down

again on the throttle. "He said it himself," Jarrod thought: "to be afraid, and yet to do. He said it himself: there's nothing in the world but being alive, knowing you are alive."

"Faster!" Louise cried. "Faster!" The car rushed on; the house, the broad veranda where the bright shawls were now sibilant, fell behind.

In that gathering of wide summer dresses, of sucked old breaths and gabbling females staccato, the proprietress stood on the veranda with the second note in her hand. "Married?" she said. "Married?" As if she were someone else, she watched herself open the note and read it again. It did not take long:

Lily:

Don't worry about me for a while longer. I'll sit here until supper time. Don't worry about me.

J. M.

"Don't worry *about* me," she said. "*About* me." She went into the lobby, where the old Negro was pottering with a broom. "And Mr. Jarrod gave you this?"

"Yessum. Give it to me runnin' and tole me to git his bags into de cyar, and next I know, here Miss Louise and him whoosh! outen de drive and up de big road like a patter-roller.*"

"And they went toward Meridian?"

"Yessum. Right past de bench whar Doctor Jules settin'." "Married," the proprietress said. "Married." Still carrying the note; she left the house and followed the path until she came in sight of the bench on which sat a motionless figure in white. She stopped again and re-read the note; again she looked up the path toward the bench which faced the road. Then she returned to the house. The women had now dispersed into chairs, though their voices still filled the veranda, sibilant, inextricable one from another; they ceased suddenly

as the proprietress approached and entered the house again. She entered the house, walking fast. That was about an hour to sundown.

Dusk was beginning to fall when she entered the kitchen. The porter was now sitting on a chair beside the stove, talking to the cook. The proprietress stopped in the door. "Uncle Charley," she said, "Go and tell Doctor Jules supper will be ready soon."

The porter rose and left the kitchen by the side door. When he passed the veranda, the proprietress stood on the top step. She watched him go on and disappear up the path toward the bench. A woman passed and spoke to her, but she made no reply; it was as though she had not heard, watching the shubbery beyond which the Negro had disappeared. And when he reappeared, the guests on the veranda saw her already in motion, descending the steps before they were even aware that the Negro was running, and they sat suddenly hushed and forward and watched her pass the Negro without stopping, her skirts lifted from her trim, school-mistress ankles and feet, and disappear up the path herself, running too. They were still sitting forward, hushed, when she too reappeared; they watched her come through the dusk and mount the porch, with on her face also a look of having seen something which she knew to be true but which she was not quite yet ready to believe. Perhaps that was why her voice was quite quiet when she addressed one of the guests by name, calling her "honey":

"Doctor Martino has just died. Will you telephone to town for me?"

Fox Hunt

AN HOUR before daylight three Negro stable-boys approached the stable, carrying a lantern. While one of them unlocked and slid back the door, the bearer of the lantern lifted it and turned the beam into the darkness where a clump of pines shouldered into the paddock fence. Out of this darkness three sets of big, spaced eyes glared mildly for a moment, then vanished. "Heyo," the Negro called. "Yawl cole?" No reply, no sound came from the darkness; the mule-eyes did not show again. The Negroes entered the barn, murmuring among themselves; a burst of laughter floated back out of the stable, mellow and meaningless and idiotic.

"How many of um you see?" the second Negro said.

"Just three mules," the lantern-bearer said. "It's more than that, though. Unc Mose he come in about two o'clock, where he been up with that Jup'ter horse; he say it was already two of um waiting there then. Clay-eaters. Hoo."

Inside the stalls horses began to whinny and stamp; over the white-washed doors the high, long muzzles moved with tossing, eager shadows; the atmosphere was rich, warm, ammoniac, and clean. The Negroes began to put feed into the patent troughs, moving from stall to stall with the clever agility of monkeys, with short, mellow, meaningless cries, "Hoo. Stand over dar. Ghy ketch dat fox to-day."

In the darkness where the clump of pines shouldered the paddock fence, eleven men squatted, surrounded by eleven

tethered mules. It was November, and the morning was chill, and the men squatted shapeless and motionless, not talking. From the stable came the sound of the eating horses; just before day broke a twelfth man came up on a mule and dismounted and squatted among the others without a word. When day came and the first saddled horse was led out of the stable, the grass was rimed with frost, and the roof of the stable looked like silver in the silver light.

It could be seen then that the squatting men were all white men and all in overalls, and that all of the mules save two were saddleless. They had gathered from one-room, clay-floored cabins about the pine land, and they squatted, decorous, grave, and patient among their gaunt and mud-caked and burr-starred mules, watching the saddled horses, the fine horses with pedigrees longer than Harrison Blair's, who owned them, being led one by one from a steam-heated stable and up the gravel path to the house, before which a pack of hounds already moiled and yapped, and on the veranda of which men and women in boots and red coats were beginning to gather.

Sloven, unhurried, outwardly scarcely attentive, the men in overalls watched Harrison Blair, who owned the house and the dogs and some of the guests too, perhaps, mount a big, vicious-looking black horse, and they watched another man lift Harrison Blair's wife onto a chestnut mare and then mount a bay horse in his turn.

One of the men in overalls was chewing tobacco slowly. Beside him stood a youth, in overalls too, gangling, with a soft stubble of beard. They spoke without moving their heads, hardly moving their lips.

"That the one?" the youth said.

The older man spat deliberately, without moving. "The one what?"

"His wife's one."

"Whose wife's one?"

"Blair's wife's one."

The other contemplated the group before the house. He appeared to, that is. His gaze was inscrutable, blank, without haste; none could have said if he were watching the man and woman or not. "Don't believe anything you hear, and not more than half you see," he said.

"What do you think about it?" the youth said.

The other spat deliberately and carefully. "Nothing," he said. "It ain't none of my wife." Then he said, without raising his voice and without any change in inflection, though he was now speaking to the head groom who had come up beside him. "That fellow don't own no horse."

"Which fellow don't?" the groom said. The white man indicated the man who was holding the bay horse against the chestnut mare's flank. "Oh," the groom said. "Mr. Gawtreay. Pity the horse, if he did."

"Pity the horse that *he* owns, too," the white man said. "Pity anything he owns."

"You mean Mr. Harrison?" the groom said. "Does these here horses look like they needs your pity?"

"Sho," the white man said. "That's right. I reckon that black horse does like to be rode like he rides it."

"Don't you be pitying no Blair horses," the groom said.

"Sho," the white man said. He appeared to contemplate the blooded horses that lived in a steam-heated house, the people in boots and pink coats, and Blair himself sitting the plunging black. "He's been trying to catch that vixen for three years now," he said. "Whyn't he let one of you boys shoot it or pizen it?"

"Shoot it or pizen it?" the groom said. "Don't you know that ain't no way to catch a fox?"

"Why ain't it?"

"It ain't spo'tin," the groom said. "You ought to been

hanging around um long enough by now to know how gempmuns hunts."

"Sho," the white man said. He was not looking at the groom. "Wonder how a man rich as folks says he is"—again he spat, in the action something meager but without intended insult, as if he might have been indicating Blair with a jerked finger—"is got time to hate one little old fox bitch like that. Don't even want the dogs to catch it. Trying to outride the dogs so he can kill it with a stick like it was a snake. Coming all the way down here every year, bringing all them folks and boarding and sleeping them, to run one little old mangy fox that I could catch in one night with a axe and a possum dog."

"That's something else about gempinuns you won't never know," the groom said.

"Sho," the white man said.

The ridge was a long shoal of pine and sand, broken along one flank into gaps through which could be seen a fallow rice field almost a mile wide which ended against a brier-choked dyke. The two men in overalls, the older man and the youth, sat their mules in one of these gaps, looking down into the field. Farther on down the ridge, about a half mile away, the dogs were at fault; the yapping cries came back up the ridge, baffled, ringing, profoundly urgent.

"You'd think he would learn in three years that he ain't going to catch ere Cal-lina fox with them Yankee city dogs," the youth said.

"He knows it," the other said. "He don't want them dogs to catch it. He can't even bear for a blooded dog to go in front of him."

"They're in front of him now though."

"You think so?"

"Where is he, then?"

"I don't know. But I know that he ain't no closer to them

fool dogs right now than that fox is. Wherever that fox is squatting right now, laughing at them dogs, that's where he is heading for."

"You mean to tell me that ere a man in the world can smell out a fox where even a city dog can't untangle it?"

"Them dogs yonder can't smell out a straight track because they don't hate that fox. A good fox- or coon- or possum-dog is a good dog because he hates a fox or a coon or a possum, not because he's got a extra good nose. It ain't his nose that leads him; it's his hating. And that's why when I see which-a-way that fellow's riding, I'll tell you which-a-way that fox has run."

The youth made a sound in his throat and nostrils. "A growl, a man. Hating a durn little old mangy fox. I be durn if it don't take a lot of trouble to be rich. I be durn if it don't."

They looked down into the field. From farther on down the ridge the eager, baffled yapping of the dogs came. The last rider in boots and pink had ridden up and passed them and gone on, and the two men sat their mules in the profound and winy and sunny silence, listening, with expressions identical and bleak and sardonic on their gaunt, yellow faces. Then the youth turned on his mule and looked back up the ridge in the direction from which the race had come. At that moment the older man turned also and, motionless, making no sound, they watched two more riders come up and pass. They were the woman on the chestnut mare and the man on the bay horse. They passed like one beast, like a double or hermaphroditic centaur with two heads and eight legs. The woman carried her hat in her hand; in the slanting sun the fine, soft cloud of her unbobbed hair gleamed like the chestnut's flank, like soft fire, the mass of it appearing to be too heavy for her slender neck. She was sitting the mare with a kind of delicate awkwardness, leaning forward as though she

were trying to outpace it, with a quality about her of flight within flight, separate and distinct from the speed of the mare.

The man was holding the bay horse against the mare's flank at full gallop. His hand lay on the woman's hand which held the reins, and he was slowly but steadily drawing both horses back, slowing them. He was leaning toward the woman; the two men on the mules could see his profile stoop past with a cold and ruthless quality like that of a stooping hawk; they could see that he was talking to the woman. They passed so, with that semblance of a thrush and a hawk in terrific immobility in mid-air, with an apparitionlike suddenness: a soft rush of hooves in the sere needles, and were gone, the man stooping, the woman leaning forward like a tableau of flight and pursuit on a lightning bolt.

Then they were gone. After a while the youth said, "That one don't seem to need no dogs neither." His head was still turned after the vanished riders. The other man said nothing. "Yes, sir," the youth said. "Just like a fox. I be durn if I see how that skinny neck of hern . . . Like you look at a fox and you wonder how a durn little critter like it can tote all that brush. And once I heard him say"—he in turn indicated, with less means than even spitting, that it was the rider of the black horse and not the bay, of whom he spoke—"something to her that a man don't say to a woman in comp'ny, and her eyes turned red like a fox's and then brown again like a fox." The other did not answer. The youth looked at him.

The older man was leaning a little forward on his mule, looking down into the field. "What's that down there?" he said. The youth looked also. From the edge of the woods beneath them came a mold-muffled rush of hooves and then a crash of undergrowth; then they saw, emerging from the woods at full gallop, Blair on the black horse. He entered the rice field at a dead run and began to cross it with the unfal-

tering and undeviating speed of a crow's flight, following a course as straight as a surveyor's line toward the dyke which bounded the field at its other side. "What did I tell you?" the older man said. "That fox is hid yonder on that ditch-bank. Well, it ain't the first time they ever seen one another eye to eye. He got close enough to it once two years ago to throw that ere leather riding-switch at it."

"Sho," the youth said. "Thes' folks don't need no dogs."

In the faint, sandy road which followed the crest of the ridge, and opposite another gap in the trees through which could be seen a pie-shaped segment of the rice field, and some distance in the rear of the hunt, stood a Ford car with a light truck body. Beneath the wheel sat a uniformed chauffeur; beside him, hunched into a black overcoat, was a man in a derby hat. He had a smooth, flaccid, indoors face and he was smoking a cigarette: a face sardonic and composed, yet at the moment a little wearily savage, like that of an indoors-bred and -inclined man subject to and helpless before some natural inclemency like cold or wet. He was talking.

"Sure. This all belongs to her, house and all. His old man owned it before they moved to New York and got rich, and Blair was born here. He bought it back and gave it to her for a wedding present. All he kept was this what-ever-it-is he's trying to catch."

"And he can't catch that," the chauffeur said.

"Sure. Coming down here every year and staying two months, without nothing to see and nowheres to go except these clay-eaters and Nigras. If he wants to live in a herd of nigras for two months every year, why don't he go and spend a while on Lenox Avenue? You don't have to drink the gin. But he's got to buy this place and give it to her for a present because she is one of thes' Southernns and she might get homesick or something. Well, that's all right, I guess. But Four-

teenth Street is far enough south for me. But still, if it ain't this, it might be Europe or somewheres. I don't know which is worse."

"Why did he marry her, anyways?" the chauffeur said.

"You want to know why he married her? It wasn't the jack, even if they did have a pot full of it, of this Oklahoma Indian oil. . . ."

"Indian oil?"

"Sure. The government give this Oklahoma to the Indians because nobody else would have it, and when the first Indian got there and seen it and dropped dead and they tried to bury him, when they stuck the shovel into the ground the oil blowed the shovel out of the fellow's hand, and so the white folks come. They would come up with a new Ford with a man from the garage driving it and they would go to an Indian and say, 'Well, John, how much rotten-water you catchum your front yard?' and the Indian would say three wells or thirteen wells or whatever it is and the white man would say, 'That's too bad. The way the White Father put the bee on you boys, it's too bad. Well, never mind. You see this fine new car here? Well, I'm going to give it to you so you can load up your folks and go on to where the water don't come out of the ground rotten and where the White Father can't put the bee on you no more.' So the Indian would load his family into the car, and the garage man would head the car west, I guess, and show the Indian where the gasoline lever was and hop off and snag the first car back to town. See?"

"Oh," the chauffeur said.

"Sure. So here we was in England one time, minding our own business, when here this old dame and her red-headed gal come piling over from Europe or somewheres where the gal was going to the high school, and here it ain't a week before Blair says, 'Well, Ernie, we're going to get married.

What the hell do you think of that?' And him a fellow that hadn't done nothing all his life but dodge skirts so he could drink all night and try to ride a horse to death all day, getting married in less than a week. But soon as I see this old dame, I know which one of her and her husband it was that had took them oil wells off the Indians."

"She must have been good, to put it on Blair at all, let alone that quick," the chauffeur said. "Tough on her, though. I'd hate for my daughter to belong to him. Not saying nothing against him, of course."

"I'd hate for my dog to belong to him. I see him kill a dog once because it wouldn't mind him. Killed it with a walking stick, with one lick. He says, 'Here: Send Andrews here to haul this away.'"

"I don't see how you put up with him," the chauffeur said. "Driving his cars, that's one thing. But you, in the house with him day and night. . . ."

"We settled that. He used to ride me when he was drinking. One day he put his hand on me and I told him I would kill him. 'When?' he says. 'When you get back from the hospital?' 'Maybe before I go there,' I says. I had my hand in my pocket. 'I believe you would,' he says. So we get along now. I put the rod away and he don't ride me any more and we get along."

"Why didn't you quit?"

"I don't know. It's a good job, even if we do stay all over the place all the time. Jeess! half the time I don't know if the next train goes to Ty Juana or Italy; I don't know half the time where I'm at or if I can read the newspaper next morning even. And I like him and he likes me."

"Maybe he quit riding you because he had something else to ride," the chauffeur said.

"Maybe so. Anyway, when they married, she hadn't never been on a horse before in all her life until he bought

this chestnut horse for her to match her hair. We went all the way to Kentucky for it, and he come back in the same car with it. I wouldn't do it; I says I would do anything in reason for him but I wasn't going to ride in no horse Pullman with it empty, let alone with a horse already in it. So I come back in a lower.

"He didn't tell her about the horse until it was in the stable. 'But I don't want to ride,' she says.

" 'My wife will be expected to ride,' he says. 'You are not in Oklahoma now.'

" 'But I can't ride,' she says.

" 'You can at least sit on top of the horse so they will think you can ride on it,' he says.

"So she goes to Callaghan, riding them practice plugs of his with the children and the chorines that have took up horse riding to get ready to get drafted from the bushes out in Brooklyn or New Jersey to the Drive or Central Park. And her hating a horse like it was a snake ever since one day when she was a kid and gets sick on a merry-go-round."

"How did you know all this?" the chauffeur said.

"I was there. We used to stop there now and then in the afternoon to see how she was coming on the horse. Sometimes she wouldn't even know we was there, or maybe she did. Anyways, here she would go, round and round among the children and one or two head of Zigfield's prize stock, passing us and not looking at us, and Blair standing there with that black face of his like a subway tunnel, like he knew all the time she couldn't ride no horse even on a merry-go-round and like he didn't care if she learned or not, just so he could watch her trying and not doing it. So at last even Callaghan come to him and told him it wasn't no use. 'Very well,' Blair says. 'Callaghan says you may be able to sit on the top of a painted horse, so I will buy you a horse out of a

dump cart and nail him to the front porch, and you can at least be sitting on top of it when we come up.'

" 'I'll go back to momma's,' she says.

" 'I wish you would,' Blair says. 'My old man tried all his life to make a banker out of me, but your old woman done it in two months.' "

" 'I thought you said they had jack of their own,' the chauffeur said. " 'Why didn't she spend some of that?' "

" 'I don't know. Maybe there wasn't no exchange for Indian money in New York. Anyways, you would have thought she was a conductor on a Broadway surface car. Sometimes she wouldn't even wait until I could get Blair under a shower and a jolt into him before breakfast, to make the touch. So the gal goes to the old dame (she lives on Park Avenue) and the gal . . . "

" 'Was you there too?' " the chauffeur said.

" 'Cried . . . What? Oh. This was a maid, a little Irish kid named Burke; me and her used to go out now and then. She was the one told me about this fellow, this Yale college boy, this Indian sweetheart.' "

" 'Indian sweetheart?' "

" 'They went to the same ward school out at Oklahoma or something. Swapped Masonic rings or something before the gal's old man found three oil wells in the henhouse and dropped dead and the old dame took the gal off to Europe to go to the school there. So this boy goes to Yale College and last year what does he do but marry a gal out of a tank show that happened to be in town. Well, when she finds that Callaghan has give her up, she goes to her old woman in Park Avenue. She cries. 'I begin to think that maybe I won't look funny to his friends, and then he comes there and watches me. He don't say nothing,' she says, 'he just stands there and watches me.' "

" 'After all I've done for you,' the old dame says. 'Got you

a husband that any gal in New York would have snapped up. When all he asks is that you learn to sit on top of a horse and not shame him before his swell friends. After all I done for you,' the old dame says.

" 'I didn't,' she says. 'I didn't want to marry him.' "

" 'Who did you want to marry?' the old dame says.

" 'I didn't want to marry nobody,' the gal says.

"So now the old dame digs up about this boy, this Allen boy that the gal . . . "

"I thought you said his name was Yale," the chauffeur said.

"No. Allen. Yale is where he went to this college."

"You mean Columbia."

"No. Yale. It's another college."

"I thought the other one was named Cornell or something," the chauffeur said.

"No. It's another one. Where these college boys all come from when these hotchachacha deadfalls get raided and they give them all a ride downtown in the wagon. Don't you read no papers?"

"Not often," the chauffeur said. "I don't care nothing about politics."

"All right. So this Yale boy's poppa had found a oil well too and he was lousy with it too, and besides the old dame was mad because Blair wouldn't leave her live in the house with them and wouldn't take her nowheres when we went. So the old dame give them all three—her and Blair and this college boy—the devil until the gal jumps up and says she will ride on a horse or bust, and Blair told her to go on and bust if she aimed to ride on this chestnut horse we brought all the way back from Kentucky. 'I don't aim for you to ruin this good horse,' Blair says. 'You'll ride on the horse I tell you to ride on.' "

"So then she would slip out the back way and go off and try to ride this horse, this good one, this Kentucky plug, to

learn how first and then surprise him. The first time didn't hurt her, but the second time it broke her collar bone, and she was scared how Blair would find it out until she found out how he had known it all the time that she was riding on it. So when we come down here for the first time that year and Blair started chasing this lyron or whatever it—"

"Fox," the chauffeur said.

"All right. That's what I said. So when—"

"You said lyron," the chauffeur said.

"All right. Leave it be a lyron. Anyways, she would ride on this chestnut horse, trying to keep up, and Blair already outrun the dogs and all, like this time two years ago when he run off from the dogs and got close enough to this lyron to hit it with his riding whip—"

"You mean fox," the chauffeur said. "A fox, not a lyron. Say . . ." The other man, the valet, secretary, whatever he might have been, was lighting another cigarette, crouched into his upturned collar, the derby slanted down upon his face.

"Say what?" he said.

"I was wondering," the chauffeur said.

"Wondering what?"

"If it's as hard for him to ride off and leave her as he thinks it is. To not see her ruining this good Kentucky horse. If he has to ride as fast to do it as he thinks he does."

"What about that?"

"Maybe he don't have to ride as fast this year as he did last year, to run off from her. What do you think about it?"

"Think about what?"

"I was wondering."

"What wondering?"

"If he knewed he don't have to ride as fast this year or not."

"Oh. You mean Gawtrety."

"That his name? Gawtrety?"

"That's it. Steve Gawtrety."

"What about him?"

"He's all right. He'll eat your grub and drink your liquor and fool your women and let you say when."

"Well, what about that?"

"Nothing. I said he was all right. He's fine by me."

"How by you?"

"Just fine, see? I done him a little favor once, and he done me a little favor, see?"

"Oh," the chauffeur said. He did not look at the other. "How long has she known him?"

"Six months and maybe a week. We was up in Connecticut and he was there. He hates a horse about as much as she does, but me and Callaghan are all right too; I done Callaghan a little favor once too, so about a week after we come back from Connecticut, I have Callaghan come in and tell Blair about this other swell dog, without telling Blair who owned it. So that night I says to Blair, 'I hear Mr. Van Dyming wants to buy this horse from Mr. Gawtrety too.' 'Buy what horse?' Blair says. 'I don't know,' I says. 'One horse looks just like another to me as long as it stays out doors where it belongs,' I says. 'So do they to Gawtrety,' Blair says. 'What horse are you talking about?' 'This horse Callaghan was telling you about,' I says. Then he begun to curse Callaghan. 'He told me he would get that horse for me,' he says. 'It don't belong to Callaghan,' I says, 'it's Mr. Gawtrety's horse.' So here it's two nights later when he brings Gawtrety home to dinner with him. That night I says, 'I guess you bought that horse.' He had been drinking and he cursed Gawtrety and Callaghan too. 'He won't sell it,' he says. 'You want to keep after him,' I says. 'A man will sell anything.' 'How keep after him, when he won't listen to a price?' he says. 'Leave your

wife do the talking,' I says. 'He'll listen to her.' That was when he hit me. . . ."

"I thought you said he just put his hand on you," the chauffeur said.

"I mean he just kind of flung out his hand when he was talking, and I happened to kind of turn my face toward him at the same time. He never aimed to hit me because he knowed I would have took him. I told him so. I had the rod in my hand, inside my coat, all the while.

"So, after that Gawtreys would come back maybe once a week because I told him I had a good job and I didn't aim to have to shoot myself out of it for no man except myself maybe. He come once a week. The first time she wouldn't leave him in. Then one day I am reading the paper (you ought to read a paper now and then. You ought to keep up with the day of the week, at least) and I read where this Yale Allen boy has run off with a show gal and they had fired him off the college for losing his amateur's standing, I guess. I guess that made him mad, after he had done jumped the college anyways. So I cut it out, and this Burke kid (me and her was all right, too) she puts it on the breakfast tray that A.M. And that afternoon, when Gawtreys happens to come back, she leaves him in, and this Burke kid happens to walk into the room sudden with something—I don't know what it was—and here is Gawtreys and her like a fade-out in the pitchers."

"So Blair got his horse," the chauffeur said.

"What horse?"

"The horse Gawtreys wouldn't sell him."

"How could he, when Gawtreys never owned no horse no more than I do, unless it's maybe some dog still finishing last year's Selling Plate at Pinlico? Besides, Gawtreys don't owe Blair no horse yet."

"Not yet?"

"She don't like him, see. The first time he come to the house alone she wouldn't leave him into the front door. And the next time, too, if this Burke kid hadn't happened to left that piece out of the papers about this college boy on the breakfast tray. And the time after that when he come, she wouldn't leave him in again; it was like he might have been a horse maybe, or even a dog, because she hated a dog worse than she did a horse even, even if she didn't have to try to ride on no dog. If it had have been a dog, Blair wouldn't have never got her to even try to ride on it. So I'd have to go out and steam Gallagher up again until it got to where I wasn't no more than one of these Russian droshkies or something."

"A Russian what?"

"One of these fellows that can't call their own soul. Every time I would leave the house I would have to meet Gawtrety in a dump somewheres and then go to see Callaghan and soap him down, because he is one of these boys with ideas, see?"

"What kind of ideas?"

"Just ideas. Out of the Sunday school paper. About how this wasn't right because he liked her and felt sorry for her and so he wanted to tell Blair he had been lying and that Gawtrety hadn't never owned no horse. Because a fellow that won't take a nickel when it's throwed right in his face, he ain't never as big a fool to nobody as he is to the man that can have some sense about religion and keep all these golden rules in the Sunday school paper where they come from. If the Lord didn't want a man to cut his own grass, why did He put Sunday on Sunday like he did? Tell me that."

"I guess you're right," the chauffeur said.

"Sure I'm right. Jees! I told Callaghan Blair would cut his throat and mine both for a Rockefeller quarter, same as any sensible man, and I ast him if he thought gals had done all give out with Blair's wife; if she was going to be the last one they made."

"So he don't . . ." the chauffeur said. He ceased; then he said, "Look there."

The other man looked. Through the gap in the trees, in the center of the segment of visible rice field, they could see a tiny pink-and-black dot. It was almost a mile away; it did not appear to be moving fast.

"What's that?" the other said. "The fox?"

"It's Blair," the chauffeur said. "He's going fast. I wonder where the others are." They watched the pink-and-black dot go on and disappear.

"They've went back home if they had any sense," the other said. "So we might as well go back too."

"I guess so," the chauffeur said. "So Gawtrety don't owe Blair no horse yet."

"Not yet. She don't like him. She wouldn't leave him in the house again after that day, and this Burke kid says she come back from a party one night because Gawtrety was there. And if it hadn't been for me, Gawtrety wouldn't a got invited down here, because she told Blair that if he come, she wouldn't come. So I'd have to work on Callaghan again so he would come in once a day and steam Blair up again about the horse to get Gawtrety invited, because Blair was going to make her come." The chauffeur got out of the car and went around to the crank. The other man lighted a cigarette. "But Blair ain't got his horse yet. You take a woman with long hair like she's got, long as she keeps her hair up, it's all right. But once you catch her with her hair down, it's just been too bad."

The chauffeur engaged the crank. Then he paused, stooped, his head turned. "Listen," he said.

"What?"

"That horn." The silver sound came again, faint, distant, prolonged.

"What's that?" the other said. "Do they have to keep soldiers here?"

"It's the horn they blow," the chauffeur said. "It means they have caught that fox."

"Jees!" the other said. "Maybe we will go back to town to-morrow."

The two men on the mules recrossed the rice field and mounted the ridge into the pines.

"Well," the youth said, "I reckon he's satisfied now."

"You reckon he is?" the other said. He rode a little in front of the youth. He did not turn his head when he spoke.

"He's run that fox three years," the youth said. "And now he's killed it. How come he ain't satisfied?"

The older man did not look back. He slouched on his gaunt, shabby mule, his overalled legs dangling. He spoke in a tone of lazy and ironical contempt. "I reckon that's something about gentle-men you won't never know."

"Fox is fox, to me," the youth said. "Can't eat it. Might as well pizen it and save them horses."

"Sho," the other said. "That's something else about them you won't never know."

"About who?"

"Gentle-men." They mounted the ridge and turned into the faint, sandy road. "Well," the older man said, "gentle-man or not, I reckon that's the only fox in Cal-lina that ever got itself killed that-a-way. Maybe that's the way they kills a fox up north."

"Then I be durn if I ain't glad I don't live up there," the youth said.

"I reckon so," the other said. "I done got along pretty well here for some time, myself."

"I'd like to see it once though," the youth said.

"I don't reckon I would," the other said, "if living there makes a man go to all this trouble to kill a fox."

They were riding up the ridge, among the pines, the holly

bushes, the huckleberries and briers. Suddenly the older man checked his mule, extending his hand backward.

"What?" the youth said. "What is it?"

The pause was hardly a pause; again the older man rode on, though he began to whistle, the tone carrying and clear though not loud, the tune lugubrious and hymnlike; from beyond the bushes which bordered the path just ahead of them there came the snort of a horse. "Who is it?" the youth said. The other said nothing. The two mules went on in single file. Then the youth said quietly, "She's got her hair down. It looks like the sun on a spring branch." The mules paced on in the light, whispering soil, their ears bobbing, the two men sitting loose, with dangling, stirrupless feet.

The woman sat the mare, her hair a bright cloud, a copper cascade in the sun, about her shoulders, her arms lifted and her hands busy in it. The man sat the bay horse a short distance away. He was lighting a cigarette. The two mules came up, tireless, shambling, with drooping heads and nodding ears. The youth looked at the woman with a stare at once bold and covert; the older man did not cease his mellow, slow, tuneless whistling; he did not appear to look at them at all. He appeared to be about to ride past without a sign when the man on the bay spoke to him.

"They caught it, did they?" he said. "We heard the horn."

"Yaas," the man in overalls said, in a dry, drawling tone. "Yaas. It got caught. 'Twarn't nothing else it could do but get caught."

The youth watched the woman looking at the older man, her hands arrested for an instant in her hair.

"What do you mean?" the man on the bay said.

"He rode it down on that black horse," the man in overalls said.

"You mean, there were no dogs there?"

"I reckon not," the other said. "Them dogs never had no

black horses to ride." The two mules had halted; the older man faced the man on the bay a little, his face hidden beneath his shapeless hat. "It crossed the old field and dropped over that ditch-bank and hid, allowing for him to jump the ditch, and then it aimed to double back, I reckon. I reckon it wasn't scared of the dogs. I reckon it had fooled them so much it wasn't worried about them. I reckon he was what worried it. I reckon him and it knowed one another after these three years same as you maybe knowed your maw or your wife maybe, only you ain't never been married none to speak of. Anyway it was on the ditch-bank, and he knowed it was there and he cut straight across the field without giving it no spell to breathe in. I reckon maybe yawl seen him, riding straight across that field like he could see like a hawk and smell like a dog. And the fox was there, where it had done fooled the dogs. But it never had no spell to breathe in, and when it had to run again and dropped over the ditch-bank, it dropped into the briers, I reckon, and it was too tired to get out and run. And he come up and jumped that ditch, just like that fox aimed for him to. Only the fox was still in the briers, and while he was going through the air he looked down and seen the fox and he clumb off the horse while it was jumping and dropped feet first into the briers like the fox done. Maybe it dodged some then; I don't know. He says it just swirled and jumped at his face and he knocked it down with his fist and trompled it dead with his boot-heels. The dogs hadn't got there then. But it so happened he never needed them." He ceased talking and sat for a moment longer, sloven and inert upon the shabby, patient mule, his face shadowed beneath his hat. "Well," he said, "I reckon I'll get on. I ain't had ne'er a bite of breakfast yet. I'll bid yawl good morning." He put his mule in motion, the second mule following. He did not look back.

But the youth did. He looked back at the man on the bay

horse, the cigarette burning in his hand, the plume of smoke faint and windless in the sunny silence, and at the woman on the chestnut, her arms lifted and her hands busy in her bright, cloudy hair; projecting, trying to project, himself, after the way of the young, toward that remote and inaccessible she, trying to encompass the vain and inarticulate instant of division and despair which, being young, was very like rage: rage at the lost woman, despair of the man in whose shape there walked the tragic and inescapable earth her ruin. "She was crying," he said, then he began to curse, savagely, without point or subject.

"Come on," the older man said. He did not look back. "I reckon them hunt breakfast hoe-cakes will be about ready time we get home."

There Was a Queen

I

ELNORA entered the back yard, coming up from her cabin. In the long afternoon the huge, square house, the premises, lay somnolent, peaceful, as they had lain for almost a hundred years, since John Sartoris had come from Carolina and built it. And he had died in it and his son Bayard had died in it, and Bayard's son John and John's son Bayard in turn had been buried from it even though the last Bayard didn't die there.

So the quiet was now the quiet of womenfolks. As Elnora crossed the back yard toward the kitchen door she remembered how ten years ago at this hour old Bayard, who was her half-brother (though possibly but not probably neither of them knew it, including Bayard's father), would be tramping up and down the back porch, shouting stableward for the Negro men and for his saddle mare. But he was dead now, and his grandson Bayard was also dead at twenty-six years old, and the Negro men were gone: Simon, Elnora's mother's husband, in the graveyard too, and Caspey, Elnora's husband, in the penitentiary for stealing, and Joby, her son, gone to Memphis to wear fine clothes on Beale Street. So there were left in the house only the first John Sartoris' sister, Virginia, who was ninety years old and who lived in a wheel chair beside a window above the flower garden, and Narcissa, young Bayard's widow, and her son. Virginia Du Pre had

come out to Mississippi in '69, the last of the Carolina family, bringing with her the clothes in which she stood and a basket containing a few panes of colored glass from a Carolina window and a few flower cuttings and two bottles of port. She had seen her brother die and then her nephew and then her great-nephew and then her two great-great-nephews, and now she lived in the unmanned house with her great-great-nephew's wife and his son, Benbow, whom she persisted in calling Johnny after his uncle, who was killed in France. And for Negroes there were Elnora who cooked, and her son Isom who tended the grounds, and her daughter Saddie who slept on a cot beside Virginia Du Pre's bed and tended her as though she were a baby.

But that was all right. "I can take care of her," Elnora thought, crossing the back yard. "I don't need no help," she said aloud, to no one—a tall, coffee-colored woman with a small, high, firm head. "Because it's a Sartoris job. Cunnel knowed that when he died and tole me to take care of her. Tole me. Not no outsiders from town." She was thinking of what had caused her to come up to the house an hour before it was necessary. This was that, while busy in her cabin, she had seen Narcissa, young Bayard's wife, and the ten-year-old boy going down across the pasture in the middle of the afternoon. She had come to her door and watched them—the boy and the big young woman in white going through the hot afternoon, down across the pasture toward the creek. She had not wondered where they were going, nor why, as a white woman would have wondered. But she was half black, and she just watched the white woman with that expression of quiet and grave contempt with which she contemplated or listened to the orders of the wife of the house's heir even while he was alive. Just as she had listened two days ago when Narcissa had informed her that she was going to Memphis for a day or so and that Elnora would have to take care of

the old aunt alone. "Like I ain't always done it," Elnora thought. "It's little you done for anybody since you come out here. We never needed you. Don't you never think it." But she didn't say this. She just thought it, and she helped Narcissa prepare for the trip and watched the carriage roll away toward town and the station without comment. "And you needn't to come back," she thought, watching the carriage disappear. But this morning Narcissa had returned, without offering to explain the sudden journey or the sudden return, and in the early afternoon Elnora from her cabin door had watched the woman and the boy go down across the pasture in the hot June sunlight.

"Well, it's her business where she going," Elnora said aloud, mounting the kitchen steps. "Same as it her business how come she went off to Memphis, leaving Miss Jenny setting yonder in her chair without nobody but niggers to look after her," she added, aloud still, with brooding inconsistency. "I ain't surprised she went. I just surprised she come back. No. I ain't even that. She ain't going to leave this place, now she done got in here." Then she said quietly, aloud, without rancor, without heat: "Trash. Town trash."

She entered the kitchen. Her daughter Saddle sat at the table, eating from a dish of cold turnip greens and looking at a thumbbed and soiled fashion magazine. "What you doing back here?" she said. "Why ain't you up yonder where you can hear Miss Jenny if she call you?"

"Miss Jenny ain't need nothing," Saddle said. "She setting there by the window."

"Where did Miss Narcissa go?"

"I don't know'm," Saddle said. "Her and Bory went off somewhere. Ain't come back yet."

Elnora grunted. Her shoes were not laced, and she stepped out of them in two motions and left the kitchen and went up the quiet, high-ceiled hall filled with scent from the gar-

den and with the drowsing and myriad sounds of the June afternoon, to the open library door. Beside the window (the sash was raised now, with its narrow border of colored Carolina glass which in the winter framed her head and bust like a hung portrait) an old woman sat in a wheel chair. She sat erect; a thin, upright woman with a delicate nose and hair the color of a whitewashed wall. About her shoulders lay a shawl of white wool, no whiter than her hair against her black dress. She was looking out the window; in profile her face was high-arched, motionless. When Elnora entered she turned her head and looked at the Negress with an expression immediate and interrogative.

"They ain't come in the back way, have they?" she said.

"Nome," Elnora said. She approached the chair.

The old woman looked out the window again. "I must say I don't understand this at all. Miss Narcissa's doing a mighty lot of traipsing around all of a sudden. Picking up and—"

Elnora came to the chair. "A right smart," she said in her cold, quiet voice, "for a woman lazy as her."

"Picking up—" the old woman said. She ceased. "You stop talking that way about her."

"I ain't said nothing but the truth," Elnora said.

"Then you keep it to yourself. She's Bayard's wife. A Sartoris woman, now."

"She won't never be a Sartoris woman," Elnora said.

The other was looking out the window. "Picking up all of a sudden two days ago and going to Memphis to spend two nights, that hadn't spent a night away from that boy since he was born. Leaving him for two whole nights, mind you, without giving any reason, and then coming home and taking him off to walk in the woods in the middle of the day. Not that he missed her. Do you think he missed her at all while she was gone?"

"Nome," Elnora said. "Ain't no Sartoris man never missed nobody."

"Of course he didn't." The old woman looked out the window. Elnora stood a little behind the chair. "Did they go on across the pasture?"

"I don't know. They went out of sight, still going. Toward the creek."

"Toward the creek? What in the world for?"

Elnora didn't answer. She stood a little behind the chair, erect, still as an Indian. The afternoon was drawing on. The sun was now falling level across the garden below the window, and soon the jasmine in the garden began to smell with evening, coming into the room in slow waves, almost palpable; thick, sweet, oversweet. The two women were motionless in the window: the one leaning a little forward in the wheel chair, the Negress a little behind the chair, motionless too and erect as a caryatid.

The light in the garden was beginning to turn copper-colored when the woman and the boy entered the garden and approached the house. The old woman in the chair leaned suddenly forward. To Elnora it seemed as if the old woman in the wheel chair had in that motion escaped her helpless body like a bird and crossed the garden to meet the child; moving forward a little herself Elnora could see on the other's face an expression fond, immediate, and oblivious. So the two people had crossed the garden and were almost to the house when the old woman sat suddenly and sharply back. "Why, they're wet!" she said. "Look at their clothes. They have been in the creek with their clothes on!"

"I reckon I better go and get supper started," Elnora said.

II

IN THE kitchen Elnora prepared the lettuce and the tomatoes, and sliced the bread (not honest cornbread, not even biscuit) which the woman whose very name she did not speak unless it was absolutely necessary, had taught her to bake. Isom and

Saddie sat in two chairs against the wall. "I got nothing against her," Elnora said. "I nigger and she white. But my black children got more blood than she got. More behavior."

"You and Miss Jenny both think ain't nobody been born since Miss Jenny," Isom said.

"Who is been?" Elnora said.

"Miss Jenny get along all right with Miss Narcissa," Isom said. "Seem to me like she the one to say. I ain't heard her say nothing about it."

"Because Miss Jenny quality," Elnora said. "That's why. And that's something you don't know nothing about, because you born too late to see any of it except her."

"Look to me like Miss Narcissa good quality as anybody else," Isom said. "I don't see no difference."

Elnora moved suddenly from the table. Isom as suddenly sprang up and moved his chair out of his mother's path. But she only went to the cupboard and took a platter from it and returned to the table, to the tomatoes. "Born Sartoris or born quality of any kind ain't *is*, it's *does*." She talked in a level, inflectionless voice above her limber, brown, deft hands. When she spoke of the two women she used "she" indiscriminately, putting the least inflection on the one which referred to Miss Jenny. "Come all the way here by Herself, and the country still full of Yankees. All the way from Cal-lina, with Her folks all killed and dead except old Marse John, and him two hundred miles away in Mississippi—"

"It's moren two hundred miles from here to Cal-lina," Isom said. "Learnt that in school. It's nigher two thousand."

Elnora's hands did not cease. She did not seem to have heard him. "With the Yankees done killed Her paw and Her husband and burned the Cal-lina house over Her and Her mammy's head, and She come all the way to Mississippi by Herself, to the only kin She had left. Getting here in the dead of winter without nothing in this world of God's but

a basket with some flower seeds and two bottles of wine and them colored window panes old Marse John put in the library window so She could look through it like it was Cal-lina. She got here at dusk-dark on Christmas Day and old Marse John and the chillen and my mammy waiting on the porch, and Her setting high-headed in the wagon for old Marse John to lift Her down. They never even kissed then, out where folks could see them. Old Marse John just said, 'Well, Jenny,' and she just said, 'Well, Johnny,' and they walked into the house, him leading Her by the hand, until they was inside the house where the commonalty couldn't spy on them. Then She begun to cry, and old Marse John holding Her, after all them four thousand miles—"

"It ain't four thousand miles from here to Cal-lina," Isom said. "Ain't but two thousand. What the book say in school."

Elnora paid no attention to him at all; her hands did not cease. "It took Her hard, the crying did. 'It's because I ain't used to crying,' she said. 'I got out of the habit of it. I never had the time. Them goddamn Yankees,' she said. 'Them goddamn Yankees.'" Elnora moved again, to the cupboard. It was as though she walked out of the sound of her voice on her silent, naked feet, leaving it to fill the quiet kitchen though the voice itself had ceased. She took another platter down and returned to the table, her hands busy again among the tomatoes and lettuce, the food which she herself could not eat. "And that's how it is that she" (she was now speaking of Narcissa; the two Negroes knew it) "thinks she can pick up and go to Memphis and frolic, and leave Her alone in this house for two nights without nobody but niggers to look after Her. Move out here under a Sartoris roof and eat Sartoris food for ten years, and then pick up and go to Memphis, same as a nigger on a excursion, without even telling why she was going."

"I thought you said Miss Jenny never needed nobody but

you to take care of her," Isom said. "I thought you said yesterday you never cared if she come back or not."

Elnora made a sound, harsh, disparaging, not loud. "Her not come back? When she worked for five years to get herself married to Bayard? Working on Miss Jenny all the time Bayard was off to that war? I watched her. Coming out here two or three times a week, with Miss Jenny thinking she was just coming out to visit like quality. But I knowed. I knowed what she was up to all the time. Because I knows trash. I knows the way trash goes about working in with quality. Quality can't see that, because it quality. But I can."

"Then Bory must be trash, too," Isom said.

Elnora turned now. But Isom was already out of his chair before she spoke. "You shut your mouth and get yourself ready to serve supper." She watched him go to the sink and prepare to wash his hands. Then she turned back to the table, her long hands brown and deft among the red tomatoes and the pale absinth-green of the lettuce. "Needings," she said. "It ain't Bory's needings and it ain't Her needings. It's dead folks' needings. Old Marse John's and Cunnel's and Mister John's and Bayard's that's dead and can't do nothing about it. That's where the needings is. That's what I'm talking about. And not nobody to see to it except Her yonder in that chair, and me, a nigger, back here in this kitchen. I ain't got nothing against her. I just say to let quality consort with quality, and unquality do the same thing. You get that coat on, now. This here is all ready."

III

IT WAS the boy who told her. She leaned forward in the wheel chair and watched through the window as the woman and the child crossed the garden and passed out of sight beyond the angle of the house. Still leaning forward and look-

ing down into the garden, she heard them enter the house and pass the library door and mount the stairs. She did not move, nor look toward the door. She continued to look down into the garden, at the now stout shrubs which she had fetched from Carolina as shoots not much bigger than matches. It was in the garden that she and the younger woman who was to marry her nephew and bear a son, had become acquainted. That was back in 1918, and young Bayard and his brother John were still in France. It was before John was killed, and two or three times a week Narcissa would come out from town to visit her while she worked among the flowers. "And she engaged to Bayard all the time and not telling me," the old woman thought. "But it was little she ever told me about anything," she thought, looking down into the garden which was beginning to fill with twilight and which she had not entered in five years. "Little enough about anything. Sometimes I wonder how she ever got herself engaged to Bayard, talking so little. Maybe she did it by just being, filling some space, like she got that letter." That was one day shortly before Bayard returned home. Narcissa came out and stayed for two hours, then just before she left she showed the letter. It was anonymous and obscene; it sounded mad, and at the time she had tried to get Narcissa to let her show the letter to Bayard's grandfather and have him make some effort to find the man and punish him, but Narcissa refused. "I'll just burn it and forget about it," Narcissa said. "Well, that's your business," the older woman said. "But that should not be permitted. A lady should not be at the mercy of a man like that, even by mail. Any gentleman will believe that, act upon it. Besides, if you don't do something about it, he'll write you again." "Then I'll show it to Colonel Sartoris," Narcissa said. She was an orphan, her brother also in France. "But can't you see I just can't have any man know that anybody thought such things about me."

"Well, I'd rather have the whole world know that somebody thought that way about me once and got horsewhipped for it, than to have him keep on thinking that way about me, unpunished. But it's your affair." "I'll just burn it and forget about it," Narcissa said. Then Bayard returned, and shortly afterward he and Narcissa were married and Narcissa came out to the house to live. Then she was pregnant, and before the child was born Bayard was killed in an airplane, and his grandfather, old Bayard, was dead and the child came, and it was two years before she thought to ask her niece if any more letters had come; and Narcissa told her no.

So they had lived quietly then, their women's life in the big house without men. Now and then she had urged Narcissa to marry again. But the other had refused, quietly, and they had gone on so for years, the two of them and the child whom she persisted in calling after his dead uncle. Then one evening a week ago, Narcissa had a guest for supper; when she learned that the guest was to be a man, she sat quite still in her chair for a time. "Ah," she thought, quietly. "It's come. Well. But it had to; she is young. And to live out here alone with a bedridden old woman. Well. But I wouldn't have her do as I did. Would not expect it of her. After all, she is not a Sartoris. She is no kin to them, to a lot of fool proud ghosts." The guest came. She did not see him until she was wheeled in to the supper table. Then she saw a bald, youngish man with a clever face and a Phi Beta Kappa key on his watch chain. The key she did not recognize, but she knew at once that he was a Jew, and when he spoke to her her outrage became fury and she jerked back in the chair like a striking snake, the motion strong enough to thrust the chair back from the table. "Narcissa," she said, "what is this Yankee doing here?"

There they were, about the candle-lit table, the three rigid people. Then the man spoke: "Madam," he said, "there'd be

no Yankees left if your sex had ever taken the field against us."

"You don't have to tell me that, young man," she said. "You can thank your stars it was just men your grandfather fought." Then she had called Isom and had herself wheeled from the table, taking no supper. And even in her bedroom she would not let them turn on the light, and she refused the tray which Narcissa sent up. She sat beside her dark window until the stranger was gone.

Then three days later Narcissa made her sudden and mysterious trip to Memphis and stayed two nights, who had never before been separated overnight from her son since he was born. She had gone without explanation and returned without explanation, and now the old woman had just watched her and the boy cross the garden, their garments still damp upon them, as though they had been in the creek.

It was the boy who told her. He came into the room in fresh clothes, his hair still damp, though neatly combed now. She said no word as he entered and came to her chair. "We been in the creek," he said. "Not swimming, though. Just sitting in the water. She wanted me to show her the swimming hole. But we didn't swim. I don't reckon she can. We just sat in the water with our clothes on. All evening. She wanted to do it."

"Ah," the old woman said. "Oh. Well. That must have been fun. Is she coming down soon?"

"Yessum. When she gets dressed."

"Well. . . . You'll have time to go outdoors a while before supper, if you want to."

"I just as soon stay in here with you, if you want me to."

"No. You go outdoors. I'll be all right until Saddy comes."

"All right." He left the room.

The window faded slowly as the sunset died. The old woman's silver head faded too, like something motionless on

a sideboard. The sparse colored panes which framed the window dreamed, rich and hushed. She sat there and presently she heard her nephew's wife descending the stairs. She sat quietly, watching the door, until the young woman entered.

She wore white: a large woman in her thirties, within the twilight something about her of that heroic quality of statuary. "Do you want the light?" she said.

"No," the old woman said. "No. Not yet." She sat erect in the wheel chair, motionless, watching the young woman cross the room, her white dress flowing slowly, heroic, like a caryatid from a temple façade come to life. She sat down.

"It was those let—" she said.

"Wait," the old woman said. "Before you begin. The jasmine. Do you smell it?"

"Yes. It was those—"

"Wait. Always about this time of day it begins. It has begun about this time of day in June for fifty-seven years this summer. I brought them from Carolina, in a basket. I remember how that first March I sat up all one night, burning newspapers about the roots. Do you smell it?"

"Yes."

"If it's marriage, I told you. I told you five years ago that I wouldn't blame you. A young woman, a widow. Even though you have a child, I told you that a child would not be enough. I told you I would not blame you for not doing as I had done. Didn't I?"

"Yes. But it's not that bad."

"Not? Not how bad?" The old woman sat erect, her head back a little, her thin face fading into the twilight with a profound quality. "I won't blame you. I told you that. You are not to consider me. My life is done; I need little; nothing the Negroes can't do. Don't you mind me, do you hear?" The other said nothing, motionless too, serene; their voices

seemed to materialize in the dusk between them, unsourced of either mouth, either still and fading face. "You'll have to tell me, then," the old woman said.

"It was those letters. Thirteen years ago: don't you remember? Before Bayard came back from France, before you even knew that we were engaged. I showed you one of them and you wanted to give it to Colonel Sartoris and let him find out who sent it and I wouldn't do it and you said that no lady would permit herself to receive anonymous love letters, no matter how badly she wanted to."

"Yes. I said it was better for the world to know that a lady had received a letter like that, than to have one man in secret thinking such things about her, unpunished. You told me you burned it."

"I lied. I kept it. And I got ten more of them. I didn't tell you because of what you said about a lady."

"Ah," the old woman said.

"Yes. I kept them all. I thought I had them hidden where nobody could ever find them."

"And you read them again. You would take them out now and then and read them again."

"I thought I had them hidden. Then you remember that night after Bayard and I were married when somebody broke into our house in town; the same night that book-keeper in Colonel Sartoris' bank stole that money and ran away? The next morning the letters were gone, and then I knew who had sent them."

"Yes," the old woman said. She had not moved, her fading head like something inanimate in silver.

"So they were out in the world. They were somewhere. I was crazy for a while. I thought of people, men, reading them, seeing not only my name on them, but the marks of my eyes where I had read them again and again. I was wild. When Bayard and I were on our honeymoon, I was wild.

I couldn't even think about him alone. It was like I was having to sleep with all the men in the world at the same time.

"Then it was almost twelve years ago, and I had Bory, and I supposed I had got over it. Got used to having them out in the world. Maybe I had begun to think that they were gone, destroyed, and I was safe. Now and then I would remember them, but it was like somehow that Bory was protecting me, that they couldn't pass him to reach me. As though if I just stayed out here and was good to Bory and you— And then, one afternoon, after twelve years, that man came out to see me, that Jew. The one who stayed to supper that night."

"Ah," the old woman said. "Yes."

"He was a Federal agent. They were still trying to catch the man who had robbed the bank, and the agent had got hold of my letters. Found them where the book-keeper had lost them or thrown them away that night while he was running away, and the agent had had them twelve years, working on the case. At last he came out to see me, trying to find out where the man had gone, thinking I must know, since the man had written me letters like that. You remember him: how you looked at him and you said, 'Narcissa, who is this Yankee?'"

"Yes. I remember."

"That man had my letters. He had had them for twelve years. He—"

"*Had*.had?" the old woman said. "*Had* had?"

"Yes. I have them now. He hadn't sent them to Washington yet, so nobody had read them except him. And now nobody will ever read them." She ceased; she breathed quietly, tranquil. "You don't understand yet, do you? He had all the information the letters could give him, but he would have to turn them in to the Department anyway

and I asked him for them but he said he would have to turn them in and I asked him if he would make his final decision in Memphis and he said why Memphis and I told him why. I knew I couldn't buy them from him with money, you see. That's why I had to go to Memphis. I had that much regard for Bory and you, to go somewhere else. And that's all. Men are all about the same, with their ideas of good and bad. Fools." She breathed quietly. Then she yawned, deep, with utter relaxation. Then she stopped yawning. She looked again at the rigid, fading silver head opposite her. "Don't you understand yet?" she said. "I had to do it. They were mine; I had to get them back. That was the only way I could do it. But I would have done more than that. So I got them. And now they are burned up. Nobody will ever see them. Because he can't tell, you see. It would ruin him to ever tell that they even existed. They might even put him in the penitentiary. And now they are burned up."

"Yes," the old woman said. "And so you came back home and you took Johnny so you and he could sit together in the creek, the running water. In Jordan. Yes, Jordan at the back of a country pasture in Mississippi."

"I had to get them back. Don't you see that?"

"Yes," the old woman said. "Yes." She sat bolt upright in the wheel chair. "Well, my Lord. Us poor, fool women—Johnny!" Her voice was sharp, peremptory.

"What?" the young woman said. "Do you want something?"

"No," the other said. "Call Johnny. I want my hat." The young woman rose. "I'll get it."

"No. I want Johnny to do it."

The young woman stood looking down at the other, the old woman erect in the wheel chair beneath the fading silver crown of her hair. Then she left the room. The old woman did not move. She sat there in the dusk until the boy

entered, carrying a small black bonnet of an ancient shape. Now and then, when the old woman became upset, they would fetch her the hat and she would place it on the exact top of her head and sit there by the window. He brought the bonnet to her. His mother was with him. It was full dusk now; the old woman was invisible save for her hair. "Do you want the light now?" the young woman said.

"No," the old woman said. She set the bonnet on the top of her head. "You all go on to supper and let me rest awhile. Go on, all of you." They obeyed, leaving her sitting there: a slender, erect figure indicated only by the single gleam of her hair, in the wheel chair beside the window framed by the sparse and defunctive Carolina glass.

IV

SINCE THE BOY'S eighth birthday, he had had his dead grandfather's place at the end of the table. Tonight however his mother rearranged things. "With just the two of us," she said. "You come and sit by me." The boy hesitated. "Please. Won't you? I got so lonesome for you last night in Memphis. Weren't you lonesome for me?"

"I slept with Aunt Jenny," the boy said. "We had a good time."

"Please."

"All right," he said. He took the chair beside hers.

"Closer," she said. She drew the chair closer. "But we won't ever again, ever. Will we?" She leaned toward him, taking his hand.

"What? Sit in the creek?"

"Not ever leave one another again."

"I didn't get lonesome. We had a good time."

"Promise. Promise, Bory." His name was Benhow, her family name.

"All right."

Isom, in a duck jacket, served them and returned to the kitchen.

"She ain't coming to supper?" Elnora said.

"Nome," Isom said. "Setting yonder by the window, in the dark. She say she don't want no supper."

Elnora looked at Saddie. "What was they doing last time you went to the library?"

"Her and Miss Narcissa talking."

"They was still talking when I went to 'nounce supper," Isom said. "I tole you that."

"I know," Elnora said. Her voice was not sharp. Neither was it gentle. It was just peremptory, soft, cold. "What were they talking about?"

"I don't know'm," Isom said. "You the one taught me not to listen to white folks."

"What were they talking about, Isom?" Elnora said. She was looking at him, grave, intent, commanding.

"'Bout somebody getting married. Miss Jenny say 'I tole you long time ago I ain't blame you. A young woman like you, I want you to marry. Not do like I done,' what she say."

"I bet she fixing to marry, too," Saddie said.

"Who marry?" Elnora said. "Her marry? What for? Give up what she got here? That ain't what it is. I wished I knowed what been going on here this last week. . . ." Her voice ceased; she turned her head toward the door as though she were listening for something. From the dining-room came the sound of the young woman's voice. But Elnora appeared to listen to something beyond this. Then she left the room. She did not go hurriedly, yet her long silent stride carried her from sight with an abruptness like that of an inanimate figure drawn on wheels, off a stage.

She went quietly up the dark hall, passing the dining-room

door unremarked by the two people at the table. They sat close. The woman was talking, leaning toward the boy. Elnora went on without a sound: a converging of shadows upon which her lighter face seemed to float without body, her eyeballs faintly white. Then she stopped suddenly. She had not reached the library door, yet she stopped, invisible, soundless, her eyes suddenly quite luminous in her almost-vanished face, and she began to chant in faint sing-song: "Oh, Lawd; oh, Lawd," not loud. Then she moved, went swiftly on, to the library door and looked into the room where beside the dead window the old woman sat motionless, indicated only by that faint single gleam of white hair, as though for ninety years life had died slowly up her spare, erect frame, to linger for a twilit instant about her head before going out, though life itself had ceased. Elnora looked for only an instant into the room. Then she turned and retraced her swift and silent steps to the dining-room door. The woman still leaned toward the boy, talking. They did not remark Elnora at once. She stood in the doorway, tall, not touching the jamb on either side. Her face was blank; she did not appear to be looking at, speaking to, any one.

"You better come quick, I reckon," she said in that soft, cold, peremptory voice.

Mountain Victory

I

THROUGH THE CABIN WINDOW the five people watched the cavalcade toil up the muddy trail and halt at the gate. First came a man on foot, leading a horse: He wore a broad hat low on his face, his body shapeless in a weathered gray cloak from which his left hand emerged, holding the reins. The bridle was silvermounted, the horse a gaunt, mud-splashed, thoroughbred bay, wearing in place of saddle a navy blue army blanket bound on it by a piece of rope. The second horse was a shortbodied, bigheaded, scrub sorrel, also mudsplashed. It wore a bridle contrived of rope and wire, and an army saddle in which, perched high above the dangling stirrups, crouched a shapeless something larger than a child, which at that distance appeared to wear no garment or garments known to man.

One of the three men at the cabin window left it quickly. The others, without turning, heard him cross the room swiftly and then return, carrying a long rifle.

"No, you don't," the older man said.

"Don't you see that cloak?" the younger said. "That rebel cloak?"

"I won't have it," the other said. "They have surrendered. They have said they are whipped."

Through the window they watched the horses stop at the gate. The gate was of sagging hickory, in a rock fence

which straggled down a gaunt slope sharp in relief against the valley and a still further range of mountains dissolving into the low, dissolving sky.

They watched the creature on the second horse descend and hand his reins also into the same left hand of the man in gray that held the reins of the thoroughbred. They watched the creature enter the gate and mount the path and disappear beyond the angle of the window. Then they heard it cross the porch and knock at the door. They stood there and heard it knock again.

After a while the older man said, without turning his head, "Go and see."

One of the women, the older one, turned from the window, her feet making no sound on the floor, since they were bare. She went to the front door and opened it. The chill, wet light of the dying April afternoon fell in upon her—upon a small woman with a gnarled expressionless face, in a gray shapeless garment. Facing her across the sill was a creature a little larger than a large monkey, dressed in a voluminous blue overcoat of a private in the Federal army, with, tied tentlike over his head and falling about his shoulders, a piece of oilcloth which might have been cut square from the hood of a sutler's wagon; within the orifice the woman could see nothing whatever save the whites of two eyes, momentary and phantomlike, as with a single glance the Negro examined the woman standing barefoot in her faded calico garment, and took in the bleak and barren interior of the cabin hall.

"Marster Major Soshay Weddel send he compliments en say he wishful fo sleeping room fo heself en boy en two hawses," he said in a pompous, parrot-like voice. The woman looked at him. Her face was like a spent mask. "V'e been up yonder a ways, fighting dem Yznkees," the Negro said. "Done quit now. Gwine back home."

The woman seemed to speak from somewhere behind her face, as though behind an effigy or a painted screen: "I'll ask him."

"We ghy pay you," the Negro said.

"Pay?" Pausing, she seemed to muse upon him. "Hit aint near a ho-tel on the mou-tin."

The Negro made a large gesture. "Don't make no diffunce. We done stayed de night in worse places den whut dis is. You just tell um it Marse Soshay Weddel." Then he saw that the woman was looking past him. He turned and saw the man in the worn gray cloak already halfway up the path from the gate. He came on and mounted the porch, removing with his left hand the broad slouched hat bearing the tarnished wreath of a Confederate field officer. He had a dark face, with dark eyes and black hair, his face at once thick yet gaunt, and arrogant. He was not tall, yet he topped the Negro by five or six inches. The cloak was weathered, faded about the shoulders where the light fell strongest. The skirts were bedraggled, frayed, mudsplashed: the garment had been patched again and again, and brushed again and again; the nap was completely gone.

"Goodday, madam," he said. "Have you stableroom for my horses and shelter for myself and my boy for the night?"

The woman looked at him with a static, musing quality, as though she had seen without alarm an apparition.

"I'll have to see," she said

"I shall pay," the man said. "I know the times."

"I'll have to ask him," the woman said. She turned, then stopped. The older man entered the hall behind her. He was big, in jean clothes, with a shock of iron-gray hair and pale eyes.

"I am Saucier Weddel," the man in gray said. "I am on my way home to Mississippi from Virginia. I am in Tennessee now?"

"You are in Tennessee," the other said. "Come in."

Weddel turned to the Negro. "Take the horses on to the stable," he said.

The Negro returned to the gate, shapeless in the oilcloth cape and the big overcoat, with that swaggering arrogance which he had assumed as soon as he saw the woman's bare feet and the meagre, barren interior of the cabin. He took up the two bridle reins and began to shout at the horses with needless and officious vociferation, to which the two horses paid no heed, as though they were long accustomed to him. It was as if the Negro himself paid no attention to his cries, as though the shouting were merely concomitant to the action of leading the horses out of sight of the door, like an effluvium by both horses and Negro accepted and relegated in the same instant.

II

THROUGH THE KITCHEN WALL the girl could hear the voices of the men in the room from which her father had driven her when the stranger approached the house. She was about twenty: a big girl with smooth, simple hair and big, smooth hands, standing barefoot in a single garment made out of flour sacks. She stood close to the wall, motionless, her head bent a little, her eyes wide and still and empty like a sleep-walker's, listening to her father and the guest enter the room beyond it.

The kitchen was a plank leanto built against the log wall of the cabin proper. From between the logs beside her the clay chinking, dried to chalk by the heat of the stove, had fallen away in places. Stooping, the movement slow and lush and soundless as the whispering of her bare feet on the floor, she leaned her eye to one of these cracks. She could see a bare table on which sat an earthenware jug and a box of musket

cartridges stenciled *U. S. Army*. At the table her two brothers sat in splint chairs, though it was only the younger one, the boy, who looked toward the door, though she knew, could hear now, that the stranger was in the room. The older brother was taking the cartridges one by one from the box and crimping them and setting them upright at his hand like a mimic parade of troops, his back to the door where she knew the stranger was now standing. She breathed quietly. "Vatch would have shot him," she said, breathed, to herself, stooping. "I reckon he will yet."

Then she heard feet again and her mother came toward the door to the kitchen, crossing and for a moment blotting the orifice. Yet she did not move, not even when her mother entered the kitchen. She stooped to the crack, her breathing regular and placid, hearing her mother clattering the stove-lids behind her. Then she saw the stranger for the first time and then she was holding her breath quietly, not even aware that she had ceased to breathe. She saw him standing beside the table in his shabby cloak, with his hat in his left hand. Vatch did not look up.

"My name is Saucier Weddel," the stranger said.

"Soshay Weddel," the girl breathed into the dry chinking, the crumbled and powdery wall. She could see him at full length, in his stained and patched and brushed cloak, with his head lifted a little and his face worn, almost gaunt, stamped with a kind of indomitable weariness and yet arrogant too, like a creature from another world with other air to breathe and another kind of blood to warm the veins. "Soshay Weddel," she breathed.

"Take some whiskey," Vatch said without moving.

Then suddenly, as it had been with the suspended breathing, she was not listening to the words at all, as though it were no longer necessary for her to hear, as though curiosity too had no place in the atmosphere in which the stranger

dwelled and in which she too dwelled for the moment as she watched the stranger standing beside the table, looking at Vatch, and Vatch now turned in his chair, a cartridge in his hand, looking up at the stranger. She breathed quietly into the crack through which the voices came now without heat or significance out of that dark and smoldering and violent and childlike vanity of men:

"I reckon you know these when you see them, then?"

"Why not? We used them too. We never always had the time nor the powder to stop and make our own. So we had to use yours now and then. Especially during the last."

"Maybe you would know them better if one exploded in your face."

"Vatch." She now looked at her father, because he had spoken. Her younger brother was raised a little in his chair, leaning a little forward, his mouth open a little. He was seventeen. Yet still the stranger stood looking quietly down at Vatch, his hat clutched against his worn cloak, with on his face that expression arrogant and weary and a little quizzical.

"You can show your other hand too," Vatch said. "Don't be afraid to leave your pistol go."

"No," the stranger said. "I am not afraid to show it."

"Take some whiskey, then," Vatch said, pushing the jug forward with a motion slighting and contemptuous.

"I am obliged infinitely," the stranger said. "It's my stomach. For three years of war I have had to apologize to my stomach; now, with peace, I must apologize for it. But if I might have a glass for my boy? Even after four years, he cannot stand cold."

"Soshay Weddel," the girl breathed into the crumbled dust beyond which the voices came, not yet raised yet forever irreconcilable and already doomed, the one blind victim, the other blind executioner:

"Or maybe behind your back you would know it better."

"You, Vatch."

"Stop, sir. If he was in the army for as long as one year, he has run too, once. Perhaps oftener, if he faced the Army of Northern Virginia."

"Soshay Weddel," the girl breathed, stooping. Now she saw Weddel, walking apparently straight toward her, a thick tumbler in his left hand and his hat crumpled beneath the same arm.

"Not that way," Vatch said. The stranger paused and looked back at Vatch. "Where are you aiming to go?"

"To take this out to my boy," the stranger said. "Out to the stable. I thought perhaps this door—" His face was in profile now, worn, haughty, wasted, the eyebrows lifted with quizzical and arrogant interrogation. Without rising Vatch jerked his head back and aside. "Come away from that door." But the stranger did not stir. Only his head moved a little, as though he had merely changed the direction of his eyes.

"He's looking at paw," the girl breathed. "He's waiting for paw to tell him. He aint skeered of Vatch. I knowed it."

"Come away from that door," Vatch said. "You damn nigra."

"So it's my face and not my uniform," the stranger said. "And you fought four years to free us, I understand."

Then she heard her father speak again. "Go out the front way and around the house, stranger," he said.

"Soshay Weddel," the girl said. Behind her her mother clattered at the stove. "Soshay Weddel," she said. She did not say it aloud. She breathed again, deep and quiet and without haste. "It's like a music. It's like a singing."

III

THE NEGRO was squatting in the hallway of the barn, the sagging and broken stalls of which were empty save for the two horses. Beside him was a worn rucksack, open. He was

engaged in polishing a pair of thin dancing slippers with a cloth and a tin of paste, empty save for a thin rim of polish about the circumference of the tin. Beside him on a piece of plank sat one finished shoe. The upper was cracked; it had a crude sole, nailed recently and crudely on by a clumsy hand.

"Thank de Lawd folks cant see de bottoms of yo feets," the Negro said. "Thank de Lawd it's just dese hyer mountain trash. I'd even hate fo Yankees to see yo feets in dese things." He rubbed the shoe, squinted at it, breathed upon it, rubbed it again upon his squatting flank.

"Here," Weddel said, extending the tumbler. It contained a liquid as colorless as water.

The Negro stopped; the shoe and the cloth suspended. "Which?" he said. He looked at the glass. "Whut's dat?"

"Drink it," Weddel said.

"Dat's water. Whut you bringing me water fer?"

"Take it," Weddel said. "It's not water."

The Negro took the glass gingerly. He held it as if it contained nitroglycerin. He looked at it, blinking, bringing the glass slowly under his nose. He blinked. "Where'd you git dis hyer?" Weddel didn't answer. He had taken up the finished slipper, looking at it. The Negro held the glass under his nose. "It smell kind of like it ought to," he said. "But I be dawg ef it look like anything. Dese folks fixing to pizen you." He tipped the glass and sipped gingerly, and lowered the glass, blinking.

"I didn't drink any of it," Weddel said. He set the slipper down.

"You better hadn't," the Negro said. "When here I done been fo years trying to take care of you en git you back home like whut Mistis tole me to do, and here you sleeping in folks' barns at night like a tramp, like a pater-roller, nigger—" He put the glass to his lips, tilting it and his head in a single jerk. He lowered the glass, empty; his eyes were closed; he

said, "Whuf!" shaking his head with a violent, shuddering motion. "It smells right, and it act right. But I be dawg ef it look right. I reckon you better let it alone, like you started out. When dey try to make you drink it you send um to me. I done already stood so much I reckon I can stand a little mo fer Mistis' sake."

He took up the shoe and the cloth again. Weddel stooped above the rucksack. "I want my pistol," he said.

Again the Negro ceased, the shoe and the cloth poised. "Whuf fer?" He leaned and looked up the muddy slope toward the cabin. "Is dese folks Yankées?" he said in a whisper.

"No," Weddel said, digging in the rucksack with his left hand. The Negro did not seem to hear him.

"In Tennessee? You tole me we was in Tennessee, where Memphis is, even if you never tole me it was all disyer up-and-down land in de Memphis country. I know I never seed none of um when I went to Memphis wid y^o paw dat time. But you says so. And now you telling me dem Memphis folks is Yankees?"

"Where is the pistol?" Weddel said.

"I done tole you," the Negro said. "Acting like you does. Letting dese folks see you come walking up de road, leading Caesar caze you think he tired; making me ride whilst you walks when I can outwalk you any day you ever lived and you knows it, even if I is fawty en you twenty-eight. I ghy tell yo maw. I ghy tell um."

Weddel rose, in his hand a heavy cap-and-ball revolver. He chuckled it in his single hand, drawing the hammer back, letting it down again. The Negro watched him, crouched like an ape in the blue Union army overcoat. "You put dat thing back," he said. "De war done wid now. Dey tole us back dar at Ferginny it was done wid. You dont need no pistol now. You put it back, you hear me?"

"I'm going to bathe," Weddel said. "Is my shirt—"

"Bathe where? In whut? Dese folks aint never seed a bathtub."

"Bathe at the well. Is my shirt ready?"

"Whut dey is of it. . . . You put dat pistol back, Marse Soshay. I ghy tell yo maw on you. I ghy tell um. I just wish Marster was here."

"Go to the kitchen," Weddel said. "Tell them I wish to bathe in the well house. Ask them to draw the curtain on that window there." The pistol had vanished beneath the grey cloak. He went to the stall where the thoroughbred was. The horse nuzzled at him, its eyes rolling soft and wild. He patted its nose with his left hand. It whickered, not loud, its breath sweet and warm.

IV

THE NEGRO entered the kitchen from the rear. He had removed the oilcloth tent and he now wore a blue forage cap which, like the overcoat, was much too large for him, resting upon the top of his head in such a way that the unsupported brim oscillated faintly when he moved as though with a life of its own. He was completely invisible save for his face between cap and collar like a dried Dyak trophy and almost as small and dusted lightly over as with a thin pallor of wood ashes by the cold. The older woman was at the stove on which frying food now hissed and sputtered; she did not look up when the Negro entered. The girl was standing in the middle of the room, doing nothing at all. She looked at the Negro, watching him with a slow, grave, secret, unwinking gaze as he crossed the kitchen with that air of swaggering caricatured assurance, and upended a block of wood beside the stove and sat upon it.

"If disyer is de kind of weather yawl has up here all de

time," he said, "I dont care ef de Yankees does has dis country." He opened the overcoat, revealing his legs and feet as being wrapped, shapeless and huge, in some muddy and anonymous substance resembling fur, giving them the appearance of two muddy beasts the size of halfgrown dogs lying on the floor; moving a little nearer the girl, the girl thought quietly *Hit's fur. He taken and cut up a fur coat to wrap his feet in*. "Yes, suh," the Negro said. "Just yawl let me git home again, en de Yankees kin have all de rest of it."

"Where do you-uns live?" the girl said.

The Negro looked at her. "In Miss'ippi. On de Domain. Aint you never hycard tell of Countymaison?"

"Countymaison?"

"Dat's it. His grandpappy named it Countymaison caze it's bigger den a county to ride over. You cant ride across it on a mule betwixt sunup and sundown. Dat's how come." He rubbed his hands slowly on his thighs. His face was now turned toward the stove; he snuffed loudly. Already the ashy overlay on his skin had disappeared, leaving his face dead black, wizened, his mouth a little loose, as though the muscles had become slack with usage, like rubber bands—not the eating muscles, the talking ones. "I reckon we is girtin nigh home, after all. Leastways dat hawg meat smell like it do down whar folks lives."

"Countymaison," the girl said in a rapt, bemused tone, looking at the Negro with her grave, unwinking regard. Then she turned her head and looked at the wall, her face perfectly serene, perfectly inscrutable, without haste, with a profound and absorbed deliberation.

"Dat's it," the Negro said. "Even Yankees is heard tell of Weddel's Countymaison en erbout Marster Francis Weddel. Maybe yawl seed um pass in de carriage dat time he went to Washn'ton to tell yawl's president how he aint like de way yawl's president wuz treating de people. He rid all de way

to Washn'ton in de carriage, wid two niggers to drive en to heat de bricks to kept he foots warm, en de man done gone on ahead wid de wagon en de fresh hawses. He carried yawl's president two whole dressed bears en eight sides of smoked deer venison. He must a passed right out dar in front yawl's house. I reckon yo pappy or maybe his pappy seed um pass." He talked on, voluble, in soporific singsong, his face beginning to glisten, to shine a little with the rich warmth, while the mother bent over the stove and the girl, motionless, static, her bare feet cupped smooth and close to the rough puncheons, her big, snlooth, young body cupped soft and richly mammalian to the rough garment, watching the Negro with her ineffable and unwinking gaze, her mouth open a little.

The Negro talked on, his eyes closed, his voice interminable, boastful, his air lazily intolerant, as if he were still at home and there had been no war and no harsh rumors of freedom and of change, and he (a stableman, in the domestic hierarchy a man of horses) were spending the evening in the quarters among field hands, until the older woman dished the food and left the room, closing the door behind her. He opened his eyes at the sound and looked toward the door and then back to the girl. She was looking at the wall, at the closed door through which her mother had vanished. "Dont dey lets you eat at de table wid um?" he said.

The girl looked at the Negro, unwinking. "Countymai-son," she said. "Vatch says he is a nigra too."

"Who? Him? A nigger? Marse Soshay Weddel? Which un is Vatch?" The girl looked at him. "It's caze yawl aint never been nowhere. Ain't never seed nothing. Living up here on a nekkid hill whar you cant even see smoke. Him a nigger? I wish his maw could hear you say dat." He looked about the kitchen, wizened, his eyeballs rolling white, ceaseless, this way and that. The girl watched him.

"Do the girls there wear shoes all the time?" she said.

The Negro looked about the kitchen, "Where does yawl keep dat ere Tennessee spring water? Back here somewhere?"

"Spring water?"

The Negro blinked slowly. "Dat ere light-drinking kahysene."

"Kahysene?"

"Dat ere light colored lamp oil whut yawl drinks. Aint you got a little of it hid back here somewhere?"

"Oh," the girl said. "You mean corn." She went to a corner and lifted a loose plank in the floor, the Negro watching her, and drew forth another earthen jug. She filled another thick tumbler and gave it to the Negro and watched him jerk it down his throat, his eyes closed. Again he said, "Whuf!" and drew his back hand across his mouth.

"Whut wuz dat you axed me?" he said.

"Do the girls down there at Countymaisoan wear shoes?"

"De ladies does. If dey didn't have none, Marse Soshay could sell a hun'ed niggers en buy um some . . . Which un is it say Marse Soshay a nigger?"

The girl watched him. "Is he married?"

"Who married? Marse Soshay?" The girl watched him. "How he have time to git married, wid us fighting de Yankees for fo years? Aint been home in fo years now where no ladies to marry is." He looked at the girl, his eyewhites a little bloodshot, his skin shining in faint and steady highlights. Thawing, he seemed to have increased in size a little too. "Whut's it ter you if he married or no?"

They looked at each other. The Negro could hear her breathing. Then she was not looking at him at all, though she had got yet even blinked nor turned her head. "I dont reckon he'd have any time for a girl that didn't have any shoes," she said. She went to the wall and stooped again to the

crack. The Negro watched her. The older woman entered and took another dish from the stove and departed without having looked at either of them.

V

THE FOUR MEN, the three men and the boy, sat about the supper table. The broken meal lay on thick plates. The knives and forks were iron. On the table the jug still sat. Weddel was now claspless. He was shaven, his still damp hair combed back. Upon his bosom the ruffles of the shirt frothed in the lamplight, the right sleeve, empty, pinned across his breast with a thin gold pin. Under the table the frail and mended dancing slippers rested among the brogans of the two men and the bare splayed feet of the boy.

"Vatch says you are a nigra," the father said.

Weddel was leaning a little back in his chair. "So that explains it," he said. "I was thinking that he was just congenitally illtempered. And having to be a victor, too."

"Are you a nigra?" the father said.

"No," Weddel said. He was looking at the boy, his weathered and wasted face a little quizzical. Across the back of his neck his hair, long, had been cut roughly as though with a knife or perhaps a bayonet. The boy watched him in complete and rapt immobility. *As if I might be an apparition* he thought. *A hant. Maybe I am.* "No," he said. "I am not a Negro."

"Who are you?" the father said.

Weddel sat a little sideways in his chair, his hand lying on the table. "Do you ask guests who they are in Tennessee?" he said. Vatch was filling a tumbler from the jug. His face was lowered, his hands big and hard. His face was hard. Weddel looked at him. "I think I know how you feel," he said. "I expect I felt that way once. But it's hard to keep on feeling any way for four years. Even feeling at all."

Vatch said something, sudden and harsh. He clapped the rumbler on to the table, splashing some of the liquor out. It looked like water, with a violent, dynamic odor. It seemed to possess an inherent volatility which carried a splash of it across the table and on to the foam of frayed yet immaculate linen on Weddel's breast, striking sudden and chill through the cloth against his flesh.

"Vatch!" the father said.

Weddel did not move; his expression arrogant, quizzical, and weary, did not change. "He did not mean to do that," he said.

"When I do," Vatch said, "it will not look like an accident."

Weddel was looking at Vatch. "I think I told you once," he said. "My name is Saucier Weddel. I am a Mississippian. I live at a place named Contalmaison. My father built it and named it. He was a Choctaw chief named Francis Weddel, of whom you have probably not heard. He was the son of a Choctaw woman and a French émigré of New Orleans, a general of Napoleon's and a knight of the Legion of Honor. His name was François Vidal. My father drove to Washington once in his carriage to remonstrate with President Jackson about the Government's treatment of his people, sending on ahead a wagon of provender and gifts and also fresh horses for the carriage, in charge of the man, the native overseer, who was a full blood Choctaw and my father's cousin. In the old days The Man was the hereditary title of the head of our clan; but after we became Europeanised like the white people, we lost the title to the branch which refused to become polluted, though we kept the slaves and the land. The Man now lives in a house a little larger than the cabins of the Negroes—an upper servant. It was in Washington that my father met and married my mother. He was killed in the Mexican War. My mother died two years ago, in '63, of a complication of pneumonia acquired while superintending

the burying of some silver on a wet night when Federal troops entered the county, and of unsuitable food; though my boy refuses to believe that she is dead. He refuses to believe that the country would have permitted the North to deprive her of the imported Martinique coffee and the beaten biscuit which she had each Sunday noon and Wednesday night. He believes that the country would have risen in arms first. But then, he is only a Negro, member of an oppressed race burdened with freedom. He has a daily list of my misdoings which he is going to tell her on me when we reach home. I went to school in France, but not very hard. Until two weeks ago I was a major of Mississippi infantry in the corps of a man named Longstreet, of whom you may have heard."

"So you were a major," Vatch said.

"That appears to be my indictment; yes."

"I have seen a rebel major before," Vatch said. "Do you want me to tell you where I saw him?"

"Tell me," Weddel said.

"He was lying by a tree. We had to stop there and lie down, and he was lying by the tree, asking for water. 'Have you any water, friend?' he said. 'Yes. I have water,' I said. 'I have plenty of water.' I had to crawl; I couldn't stand up. I crawled over to him and I lifted him so that his head would be propped against the tree. I fixed his face to the front."

"Didn't you have a bayonet?" Weddel said. "But I forgot; you couldn't stand up."

"Then I crawled back. I had to crawl back a hundred yards, where—"

"Back?"

"It was too close. Who can do decent shooting that close? I had to crawl back, and then the damned musket—"

"Damn musket?" Weddel sat a little sideways in his chair, his hand on the table, his face quizzical and sardonic, contained.

"I missed, the first shot. I had his face propped up and turned, and his eyes open watching me, and then I missed. I hit him in the throat and I had to shoot again because of the damned musket."

"Vatch," the father said.

Vatch's hands were on the table. His head, his face, were like his father's, though without the father's deliberation. His face was furious, still, unpredictable. "It was that damn musket. I had to shoot three times. Then he had three eyes, in a row across his face propped against the tree, all three of them open, like he was watching me with three eyes. I gave him another eye, to see better with. But I had to shoot twice because of the damn musket."

"You, Vatch," the father said. He stood now, his hands on the table, propping his gaunt body. "Dont you mind Vatch, stranger. The war is over now."

"I dont mind him," Weddel said. His hands went to his bosom, disappearing into the foam of linen while he watched Vatch steadily with his alert, quizzical, sardonic gaze. "I have seen too many of him for too long a time to mind one of him any more."

"Take some whiskey," Vatch said.

"Are you just making a point?"

"Damn the pistol," Vatch said. "Take some whiskey."

Weddel laid his hand again on the table. But instead of pouring, Vatch held the jug poised over the tumbler. He was looking past Weddel's shoulder. Weddel turned. The girl was in the room, standing in the doorway with her mother just behind her. The mother said as if she were speaking to the floor under her feet: "I tried to keep her back, like you said. I tried to. But she is strong as a man; hardheaded like a man."

"You go back," the father said.

"Me to go back?" the mother said to the floor.

The father spoke a name; Weddel did not catch it; he did not even know that he had missed it. "You go back."

The girl moved. She was not looking at any of them. She came to the chair on which lay Weddel's worn and mended cloak and opened it, revealing the four ragged slashes where the sable lining had been cut out as though with a knife. She was looking at the cloak when Vatch grasped her by the shoulder, but it was at Weddel that she looked. "You cut hit out and gave hit to that nigra to wrap his feet in," she said. Then the father grasped Vatch in turn. Weddel had not stirred, his face turned over his shoulder; beside him the boy was upraised out of his chair by his arms, his young, slacked face leaned forward into the lamp. But save for the breathing of Vatch and the father there was no sound in the room.

"I am stronger than you are, still," the father said. "I am a better man still, or as good."

"You wont be always," Vatch said.

The father looked back over his shoulder at the girl. "Go back," he said. She turned and went back toward the hall, her feet silent as rubber feet. Again the father called that name which Weddel had not caught; again he did not catch it and was not aware again that he had not. She went out the door. The father looked at Weddel. Weddel's attitude was unchanged, save that once more his hand was hidden inside his bosom. They looked at one another—the cold, Nordic face and the half Gallic half Mongol face thin and worn like a bronze casting, with eyes like those of the dead, in which only vision has ceased and not sight. "Take your horses, and go," the father said.

VI

It was dark in the hall, and cold, with the black chill of the mountain April coming up through the floor about her bare

legs and her body in the single coarse garment. "He cut the lining outen his cloak to wrap that nigra's feet in," she said. "He done hit for a nigra." The door behind her opened. Against the lamplight a man loomed, then the door shut behind him. "Is it Vatch or paw?" she said. Then something struck her across the back—a leather strap. "I was afeared it would be Vatch," she said. The blow fell again.

"Go to bed," the father said.

"You can whip me, but you cant whip him," she said.

The blow fell again: a thick, flat, soft sound upon her immediate flesh beneath the coarse sacking.

VII

IN THE deserted kitchen the Negro sat for a moment longer on the upturned block beside the stove, looking at the door. Then he rose carefully, one hand on the wall.

"Whuf!" he said. "Wish us had a spring on de Domain whut run dat. Stock would git trompled to death, sho mon." He blinked at the door, listening, then he moved, letting himself carefully along the wall, stopping now and then to look toward the door and listen, his air cunning, unsteady, and alert. He reached the corner and lifted the loose plank, stopping carefully, bracing himself against the wall. He lifted the jug out, whereupon he lost his balance and sprawled on his face, his face ludicrous and earnest with astonishment. He got up and sat flat on the floor, carefully, the jug between his knees, and lifted the jug and drank. He drank a long time.

"Whuf!" he said. "Or de Domain we'd give disyer stuff to de hawgs. But deseyer ign'unt mountain trash—" He drank again; then with the jug poised there came into his face an expression of concern and then consternation. He set the jug down and tried to get up, sprawling above the jug, gaining his feet at last, stooped, swaying, drooling, with

that expression of outraged consternation on his face. Then he fell headlong to the floor, overturning the jug.

VIII

THEY STOOPED above the Negro, talking quietly to one another—Weddel in his frothed shirt, the father and the boy.

"We'll have to tote him," the father said.

They lifted the Negro. With his single hand Weddel jerked the Negro's head up, shaking him. "Jubal," he said.

The Negro struck out, clumsily, with one arm. "Le'm be," he muttered. "Le'm go."

"Jubal!" Weddel said.

The Negro thrashed, sudden and violent. "You le'm be," he said. "I ghy tell de Man. I ghy tell um." He ceased, muttering: "Field hands. Field niggers."

"We'll have to tote him," the father said.

"Yes," Weddel said. "I'm sorry for this. I should have warned you. But I didn't think there was another jug he could have gained access to." He stooped, getting his single hand under the Negro's shoulders.

"Get away," the father said. "Me and Hule can do it." He and the boy picked the Negro up. Weddel opened the door. They emerged into the high black cold. Below them the barn loomed. They carried the Negro down the slope. "Get them horses out, Hule," the father said.

"Horses?" Weddel said. "He cant ride now. He cant stay on a horse."

They looked at one another, each toward the other voice, in the cold, the icy silence.

"You wont go now?" the father said.

"I am sorry. You see I cannot depart now. I will have to stay until daylight, until he is sober. We will go then."

"Leave him here. Leave him one horse, and you ride on. He is nothing but a nigra."

"I am sorry. Not after four years." His voice was quizzical, whimsical almost, yet with that quality of indomitable weariness. "I've worried with him this far; I reckon I will get him on home."

"I have warned you," the father said.

"I am obliged. We will move at daylight. If Hule will be kind enough to help me get him into the loft."

The father had stepped back. "Put that nigra down, Hule," he said.

"He will freeze here," Weddel said. "I must get him into the loft." He hauled the Negro up and propped him against the wall and stooped to hunch the Negro's lax body onto his shoulder. The weight rose easily, though he did not understand why until the father spoke again:

"Hule. Come away from there."

"Yes; go," Weddel said quietly. "I can get him up the ladder." He could hear the boy's breathing, fast, young, swift with excitement perhaps. Weddel did not pause to speculate, nor at the faintly hysterical tone of the boy's voice:

"I'll help you."

Weddel didn't object again. He slapped the Negro awake and they set his feet on the ladder rungs, pushing him upward. Halfway up he stopped; again he thrashed out at them. "I ghy tell um. I ghy tell d. Man. I ghy tell Mistis. Field hands. Field niggers."

IX

THEY LAY side by side in the loft, beneath the cloak and the two saddle blankets. There was no hay. The Negro snored, his breath reeking and harsh, thick. Below, in its stall, the Thoroughbred stamped now and then. Weddel lay on his

back, his arm across his chest, the hand clutching the stub of the other arm. Overhead, through the cracks in the roof the sky showed—the thick chill, black sky which would rain again tomorrow and on every tomorrow until they left the mountains. “If I leave the mountains,” he said quietly, motionless on his back beside the snoring Negro, staring upward. “I was concerned. I had thought that it was exhausted; that I had lost the privilege of being afraid. But I have not. And so I am happy. Quite happy.” He lay rigid on his back in the cold darkness, thinking of home. “Contalmaison. Our lives are summed up in sounds and made significant. Victory. Defeat. Peace. Home. That’s why we must do so much to invent meanings for the sounds, so damned much. Especially if you are unfortunate enough to be victorious: so damned much. It’s nice to be whipped; quiet to be whipped. To be whipped and to lie under a broken roof, thinking of home.” The Negro snored. “So damned much”; seeming to watch the words shape quietly in the darkness above his mouth. “What would happen, say, a man in the lobby of the Gayoso, in Memphis, laughing suddenly aloud. But I am quite happy—” Then he heard the sound. He lay utterly still then, his hand clutching the butt of the pistol warm beneath the stub of his right arm, hearing the quiet, almost infinitesimal sound as it mounted the ladder. But he made no move until he saw the dim orifice of the trap door blotted out. “Stop where you are,” he said.

“It’s me,” the voice said; the voice of the boy, again with that swift, breathless quality which even now Weddel did not pause to designate as excitement or even to remark at all. The boy came on his hands and knees across the dry, sibilant chaff which dusted the floor. “Go ahead and shoot,” he said. On his hands and knees he loomed above Weddel with his panting breath. “I wish I was dead, I so wish hit. I wish we was both dead. I could wish like Vatch wishes. Why did you uns have to stop here?”

Weddel had not moved. "Why does Vatch wish I was dead?"

"Because he can still hear you uns yelling. I used to sleep with him and he wakes up at night and once paw had to keep him from choking me to death before he waked up and him sweating, hearing you uns yelling still. Without nothing but unloaded guns, yelling, Vatch said, like scarecrows across a cornpatch, running." He was crying now, not aloud. "Damn you! Damn you to hell!"

"Yes," Weddel said. "I have heard them, myself. But why do you wish you were dead?"

"Because she was trying to come, herself. Only she had to—"

"Who? She? Your sister?"

"—had to go through the room to get out. Paw was awake. He said, 'If you go out that door, dont you never come back.' And she said, 'I dont aim to.' And Vatch was awake too and he said, 'Make him marry you quick because you are going to be a widow at daylight.' And she come back and told me. But I was awake too. She told me to tell you."

"Tell me what?" Weddel said. The boy cried quietly, with a kind of patient and utter despair.

"I told her if you was a nigra, and if she done that—I told her that I—"

"What? If she did what? What does she want you to tell me?"

"About the window into the attic where her and me sleep. There is a foot ladder I made to come back from hunting at night for you to get in. But I told her if you was a nigra and if she done that I would—"

"Now then," Weddel said sharply; "pull yourself together now. Dont you remember? I never even saw her but that one time when she came in the room and your father sent her out."

"But you saw her then. And she saw you."

"No," Weddel said.

The boy ceased to cry. He was quite still above Weddel. "No what?"

"I wont do it. Climb up your ladder."

For a while the boy seemed to muse above him, motionless, breathing slow and quiet now; he spoke now in a, musing, almost dreamy tone: "I could kill you easy. You aint got but one arm, even if you are older. . . ." Suddenly he moved, with almost unbelievable quickness; Weddel's first intimation was when the boy's hard, overlarge hands took him by the throat. Weddel did not move. "I could kill you easy. And wouldn't none mind."

"Shhhhhh," Weddel said. "Not so loud."

"Wouldn't none care." He held Weddel's throat with hard, awkward restraint. Weddel could feel the choking and the shaking expend itself somewhere about the boy's forearms before it reached his hands, as though the connection between brain and hands was incomplete. "Wouldn't none care. Except Vatch would be mad."

"I have a pistol," Weddel said.

"Then shoot me with it. Go on."

"No."

"No what?"

"I told you before."

"You swear you wont do it? Do you swear?"

"Listen a moment," Weddel said; he spoke now with a sort of soothing patience, as though he spoke one-syllable words to a child: "I just want to go home. That's all. I have been away from home for four years. All I want is to go home. Dont you see? I want to see what I have left there, after four years."

"What do you do there?" The boy's hands were loose and hard about Weddel's throat, his arms still, rigid. "Do you hunt all day, and all night too if you want, with a horse to

ride and nigras to wait on you, to shine your boots and saddle the horse, and you setting on the gallery, eating, until time to go hunting again?"

"I hope so. I haven't been home in four years, you see. So I dont know any more."

"Take me with you."

"I dont know what's there, you see. There may not be anything there: no horses to ride and nothing to hunt. The Yankees were there, and my mother died right afterward, and I dont know what we would find there, until I can go and see."

"I'll work. We'll both work. You can get married in Mayesfield. It's not far."

"Married? Oh. Your . . . I see. How do you know I am not already married? Now the boy's hands shut on his throat, shaking him. "Stop it!" he said.

"If you say you have got a wife, I will kill you," the boy said.

"No," Weddel said. "I am not married."

"And you dont aim to climb up that foot ladder?"

"No. I never saw her but once. I might not even know her if I saw her again."

"She says different. I dont believe you. You are lying."

"No," Weddel said.

"Is it because you are afraid to?"

"Yes. That's it."

"Of Vatch?"

"Not Vatch. I'm just afraid. I think my luck has given out. I know that it has lasted too long; I am afraid that I shall find that I have forgot how to be afraid. So I cant risk it. I cant risk finding that I have lost touch with truth. Not like Jubal here. He believes that I still belong to him; he will not believe that I have been freed. He wont even let me tell him so. He does not need to bother about truth, you see."

"We would work. She might not look like the Miss'ippi women that wear shoes all the time. But we would learn. We would not shame you before them."

"No," Weddel said. "I cannot."

"Then you go away. Now."

"How can I? You see that he cannot ride, cannot stay on a horse." The boy did not answer at once; an instant later Weddel could almost feel the tenseness, the utter immobility, though he himself had heard no sound; he knew that the boy, crouching, not breathing, was looking toward the ladder. "Which one is it?" Weddel whispered.

"It's paw."

"I'll go down. You stay here. You keep my pistol for me."

X

THE DARK AIR was high, chill, cold. In the vast invisible darkness the valley lay, the opposite cold and invisible range black on the black sky. Clutching the stub of his missing arm across his chest, he shivered slowly and steadily.

"Go," the father said.

"The war is over," Weddel said. "Vatch's victory is not my trouble."

"Take your horses and nagra, and ride on."

"If you mean your daughter, I never saw her but once and I never expect to see her again."

"Ride on," the father said. "Take what is yours, and ride on."

"I cannot." They faced one another in the darkness. "After four years I have bought immunity from running."

"You have till daylight."

"I have had less than that in Virginia for four years. And this is just Tennessee." But the other had turned; he dissolved into the black slope. Weddel entered the stable and mounted

the ladder. Motionless above the snoring Negro the boy squatted.

"Leave him here," the boy said. "He aint nothing but a nigra. Leave him, and go."

"No," Weddel said.

The Boy squatted above the snoring Negro. He was not looking at Weddel, yet there was between them, quiet and soundless, the copse, the sharp dry report, the abrupt wild thunder of upreared horse, the wisping smoke. "I can show you a short cut down to the valley. You will be out of the mountains in two hours. By daybreak you will be ten miles away."

"I cant. He wants to go home too. I must get him home too." He stooped; with his single hand he spread the cloak awkwardly, covering the Negro closer with it. He heard the boy creep away, but he did not look. After a while he shook the Negro. "Jubal," he said. The Negro groaned; he turned heavily, sleeping again. Weddel squatted above him as the boy had done. "I thought that I had lost it for good," he said. "—The peace and the quiet; the power to be afraid again."

XI

THE CABIN was gaunt and bleak in the thick cold dawn when the two horses passed out the sagging gate and into the churned road, the Negro on the Thoroughbred, Weddel on the sorrel. The Negro was shivering. He sat hunched and high, with updrawn knees, his face almost invisible, in the oilcloth hood.

"I tole you dey wuz fixing to pizen us wid dat stuff," he said. "I tole you. Hillbilly rednecks. En you not only let um pizen me, you fotch me de pizen wid yo own hand. O Lawd, O Lawd! If we ever does git home."

Weddel looked back at the cabin, at the weathered, blank

house where there was no sign of any life, not even smoke. "She has a young man, I suppose—a beau." He spoke aloud, musing, quizzical. "And that boy. Hule. He said to come within sight of a laurel copse where the road disappears, and take a path to the left. He said we must not pass that copse."

"Who says which?" the Negro said. "I aint going nowhere. I going back to dat loft en lay down."

"All right," Weddel said. "Get down."

"Git down?"

"I'll need both horses. You can walk on when you are through sleeping."

"I ghy tell yo maw," the Negro said. "I ghy tell um. Ghy tell how after four yeats you aint got no more sense than to not know a Yankee when you seed um. To stay de night wid Yankees en let um pizen one of Mistis' niggers. I ghy tell um."

"I thought you were going to stay here," Weddel said. He was shivering too. "Yet I am not cold," he said. "I am not cold."

"Stay here? Me? How in de world you ever git home widout me? Whut I tell Mistis when I come in widout you en she ax me whar you is?"

"Come," Weddel said. He lifted the sorrel into motion. He looked quietly back at the house, then rode on. Behind him on the Thoroughbred the Negro muttered and mumbled to himself in woebegone singsong. The road, the long hill which yesterday they had toiled up, descended now. It was muddy, rockchurned, scarred across the barren and rocky land beneath the dissolving sky, jolting downward to where the pines and laurel began. After a while the cabin had disappeared.

"And so I am running away," Weddel said. "When I get home I shall not be very proud of this. Yes, I will. It means that I am still alive. Still alive, since I still know fear and desire. Since life is an affirmation of the past and a promise to

the future. So I am still alive—Ah.” It was the laurel copse. About three hundred yards ahead it seemed to have sprung motionless and darkly secret in the air which of itself was mostly water. He drew rein sharply, the Negro, hunched, moaning, his face completely hidden, overriding him unawares until the Thoroughbred stopped of its own accord. “But I don’t see any path—” Weddel said; then a figure emerged from the copse, running toward them. Weddel thrust the reins beneath his groin and withdrew his hand inside his cloak. Then he saw that it was the boy. He came up trotting. His face was white, strained, his eyes quite grave.

“It’s right yonder,” he said.

“Thank you,” Weddel said. “It was kind of you to come and show us, though we could have found it, I imagine.”

“Yes,” the boy said as though he had not heard. He had already taken the sorrel’s bridle. “Right tother of the brush. You cant see hit until you are in hit.”

“In whut?” the Negro said. “I ghy tell um. After four years you aint got no more sense. . . .”

“Hush,” Weddel said. He said to the boy, “I am obliged to you. You’ll have to take that in lieu of anything better. And now you get on back home. We can find the path. We will be all right now.”

“They know the path too,” the boy said. He drew the sorrel forward. “Come on.”

“Wait,” Weddel said, drawing the sorrel up. The boy still tugged at the bridle, looking on ahead toward the copse. “So we have one guess and they have one guess. Is that it?”

“Damn you to hell, come on!” the boy said, in a kind of thin frenzy. “I am sick of hit. Sick of hit.”

“Well,” Weddel said. He looked about, quizzical, sardonic, with his gaunt, weary, wasted face. “But I must move. I cant stay here, not even if I had a house, a roof to live under. So I have to choose between three things. That’s what throws a

man off—that extra alternative. Just when he has come to realize that living consists in choosing wrongly between two alternatives, to have to choose among three. You go back home.”

The boy turned and looked up at him. “We’d work. We could go back to the house now, since paw and Vatch are . . . We could ride down the mou-tin, two on one horse and two on tother. We could go back to the valley and get married at Mayesfield. We would not shame you.”

“But she has a young man, hasn’t she? Somebody that waits for her at church on Sunday and walks home and takes Sunday dinner, and maybe fights the other young men because of her?”

“You wont take us, then?”

“No. You go back home.”

For a while the boy stood, holding the bridle, his face lowered. Then he turned; he said quietly: “Come on, then. We got to hurry.”

“Wait,” Weddel said; “what are you going to do?”

“I’m going a piece with you. Come on.” He dragged the sorrel forward, toward the roadside.

“Here,” Weddel said, “you go on back home. The war is over now. Vatch knows that.”

The boy did not answer. He led the sorrel into the underbrush. The Thoroughbred hung back. “Whoa, you Caesar!” the Negro said. “Wait, Marse Soshay. I aint gwine ride down no. . . .”

The boy looked over his shoulder without stopping. “You keep back there,” he said. “You keep where you are.”

The path was a faint scar, doubling and twisting among the brush. “I see it now,” Weddel said. “You go back.”

“I’ll go, a piece with you,” the boy said; so quietly that Weddel discovered that he had been holding his breath, in a taut, strained alertness. He breathed again, while the sorrel

jolted stiffly downward beneath him. "Nonsense," he thought. "He will have me playing Indian also in five minutes more. I had wanted to recover the power to be afraid, but I seem to have outdone myself." The path widened; the Thoroughbred came alongside, the boy walking between them; again he looked at the Negro.

"You keep back, I tell you," he said.

"Why back?" Weddel said. He looked at the boy's wan, strained face; he thought swiftly, "I don't know whether I am playing Indian or not." He said aloud: "Why must he keep back?"

The boy looked at Weddel; he stopped, pulling the sorrel up. "We'd work," he said. "We wouldn't shame you."

Weddel's face was now as sober as the boy's. They looked at one another. "Do you think we have guessed wrong? We had to guess. We had to guess one out of three."

Again it was as if the boy had not heard him. "You won't think hit is me? You swear hit?"

"Yes. I swear it." He spoke quietly, watching the boy; they spoke now as two men or two children. "What do you think we ought to do?"

"Turn back. They will be gone now. We could . . ." He drew back on the bridle; again the Thoroughbred came abreast and forged ahead.

"You mean, it could be along here?" Weddel said. Suddenly he spurred the sorrel, jerking the clinging boy forward. "Let go," he said. The boy held onto the bridle, swept forward until the two horses were again abreast. On the Thoroughbred the Negro perched, highkneed, his mouth still talking, flobbered down with ready speech, easy and worn with talk like an old shoe with walking.

"I done tole him en tole him," the Negro said.

"Let go!" Weddel said, spurring the sorrel, forcing its shoulder into the boy. "Let go!"

"You wont turn back?" the boy said. "You wont?"

"Let go!" Weddel said. His teeth showed a little beneath his mustache; he lifted the sorrel bodily with the spurs. The boy let go of the bridle and ducked beneath the Thoroughbred's neck; Weddel, glancing back as the sorrel leaped, saw the boy surge upward and on to the Thoroughbred's back, shoving the Negro back along its spine until he vanished.

"They think you will be riding the good horse," the boy said in a thin, panting voice; "I told them you would be riding . . . Down the mou-tin!" he cried as the Thoroughbred swept past; "the horse can make hit! Git outen the path! Git outen the. . . ." Weddel spurred the sorrel; almost abreast the two horses reached the bend where the path doubled back upon itself and into a matted shoulder of laurel and rhododendron. The boy looked back over his shoulder. "Keep back!" he cried. "Git outen the path!" Weddel rowelled the sorrel. On his face was a thin grimace of exasperation and anger almost like smiling.

It was still on his dead face when he struck the earth, his foot still fast in the stirrup. The sorrel leaped at the sound and dragged Weddel to the path side and halted and whirled and snorted once, and began to graze. The Thoroughbred however rushed on past the curve and whirled and rushed back, the blanket twisted under its belly and its eyes rolling, springing over the boy's body where it lay in the path, the face wrenched sideways against a stone, the arms back-sprawled, openpalmed, like a woman with lifted skirts springing across a puddle. Then it whirled and stood above Weddel's body, whinnying, with tossing head, watching the laurel copse and the fading gout of black powder smoke as it faded away.

The Negro was on his hands and knees when the two men emerged from the copse. One of them was running. The Negro watched him run forward, crying monotonously.

"The durned fool! The durned fool! The durned fool!" and then stop suddenly and drop the gun; squatting, the Negro saw him become stone still above the fallen gun, looking dawn at the boy's body with an expression of shock and amazement like he was waking from a dream. Then the Negro saw the other man. In the act of stopping, the second man swung the rifle up and began to reload it. The Negro did not move. On his hands and knees he watched the two white men, his irises rushing and wild in the bloodshot whites. Then he too moved and, still on hands and knees, he turned and scuttled to where Weddel lay beneath the sorrel and crouched over Weddel and looked again and watched the second man backing slowly away up the path, loading the rifle. He watched the man stop; he did not close his eyes nor look away. He watched the rifle elongate and then rise and diminish slowly and become a round spot against the white shape of Vatch's face like a period on a page. Crouching, the Negro's eyes rushed wild and steady and red, like those of a cornered animal.

Beyond

THE HARD ROUND ear of the stethoscope was cold and unpleasant upon his naked chest; the room, big and square, furnished with clumsy walnut--the bed where he had first slept alone, which had been his marriage bed, in which his son had been conceived and been born and lain dressed for the coffin--the room familiar for sixty-five years, by ordinary peaceful and lonely and so peculiarly his own as to have the same odor which he had, seemed to be cluttered with people, though there were but three of them and all of them he knew: Lucius Peabody who should have been down town attending to his medical practice, and the two Negroes, the one who should be in the kitchen and the other with the lawn mower on the lawn, making some pretence toward earning the money which on Saturday night they would expect.

But worst of all was the hard cold little ear of the stethoscope, worse even than the outrage of his bared chest with its fine delicate matting of gray hair. In fact, about the whole business there was just one alleviating circumstance. "At least," he thought with fretted and sardonic humor, "I am spared that uproar of female connections which might have been my lot, which is the ordinary concomitant of occasions of marriage or divorce. And if he will just move

his damned little toy telephone and let my niggers go back to work—”

And then, before he had finished the thought, Peabody did remove the stethoscope. And then, just as he was settling himself back into the pillow with a sigh of fretted relief, one of the Negroes, the woman, set up such a pandemonium of wailing as to fetch him bolt upright in the bed, his hands to his ears. The Negress stood at the foot of the bed, her long limber black hands motionless on the footboard, her eyes whitely backrolled into her skull and her mouth wide open, while from it rolled slow billows of soprano sound as mellow as high-register organ tones and wall-shattering as a steamer siren.

“Chlory!” he shouted. “Stop that!” She didn’t stop. Apparently she could neither see nor hear. “You, Jake!” he shouted to the Negro man who stood beside her, his hands too on the footboard, his face brooding upon the bed with an expression darkly and profoundly enigmatic; “get her out of here! At once!” But Jake too did not move, and he then turned to Peabody in angry outrage. “Here! Loosh! Get these damn niggers out of here!” But Peabody also did not seem to hear him. The Judge watched him methodically folding the stethoscope into its case; glared at him for a moment longer while the woman’s shattering noise billowed through the room. Then he flung the covers back and rose from the bed and hurried furiously from the room and from the house.

At once he realized that he was still in his pajamas, so he buttoned his overcoat. It was of broadcloth, black, brushed, of an outmoded elegance, with a sable collar. “At least they didn’t have time to hide this from me,” he thought in fretted rage. “Now, if I just had my. . . .” He looked down at his feet. “Ah. I seem to have. . . .” He looked at his shoes. “That’s fortunate, too.” Then the momentary surprise faded

roo, now that outrage had space in which to disseminate itself. He touched his hat, then he put his hand to his lapel. The jasmine was there. Say what he would, curse Jake as he often had to do, the Negro never forgot whatever flower in its season. Always it would be there, fresh and recent and unblemished, on the morning coffee tray. The flower and the. . . . He clasped his ebony stick beneath his arm and opened the briefcase. The two fresh handkerchiefs were there, beside the book. He thrust one of them into his breast pocket and went on. After a while the noise of Chlory's wailing died away.

Then for a little while it was definitely unpleasant. He detested crowds: the milling and airless and patient stupidity; the concussion of life-quick flesh with his own. But presently, if not soon, he was free, and standing so, still a little ruffled, a little annoyed, he looked back with fading outrage and distaste at the throng as it clotted quietly through the entrance. With fading distaste until the distaste was gone, leaving his face quiet and quite intelligent, with a faint and long constant overtone of quizzical bemusement not yet tinctured with surprised speculation, not yet puzzled, not yet wary. That was to come later. Hence it did not show in his voice, which was now merely light, quizzical, contained, "There seems to be quite a crowd of them."

"Yes," the other said. The Judge looked at him and saw a young man in conventional morning dress with some subtle effluvium of weddings, watching the entrance with a strained, patient air.

"You are expecting someone?" the Judge said.

Now the other looked at him. "Yes. You didn't see— But you don't know her."

"Know whom?"

"My wife. That is, she is not my wife yet. But the wedding was to be at noon."

"Something happened, did it?"

"I had to do it." The young man looked at him, strained, anxious. "I was late. That's why I was driving fast. A child ran into the road. I was going too fast to stop. So I had to turn."

"But you missed the child?"

"Yes." The other looked at him. "You don't know her?"

"And are you waiting here to. . . ." The judge stared at the other. His eyes were narrowed, his gaze was piercing, hard. He said suddenly, sharply, "Nonsense."

"What? What did you say?" the other asked with his vague, strained, almost beseeching air. The Judge looked away. His frowning concentration, his reflex of angry astonishment, was gone. He seemed to have wiped it from his face by a sudden deliberate action. He was like a man who, not a swordsman, has practiced with a blade a little against a certain improbable crisis, and who suddenly finds himself, blade in hand, face to face with the event. He looked at the entrance, his face alert, musing swiftly: he seemed to muse upon the entering faces with a still and furious concentration, and quietly; quietly he looked about, then at the other again. The young man still watched him.

"You're looking for your wife too, I suppose," he said. "I hope you find her. I hope you do." He spoke with a sort of quiet despair. "I suppose she is old, as you are. It must be hell on the one who has to watch and wait for the other one he or she has grown old in marriage with, because it is so terrible to wait and watch like me, for a girl who is a maiden to you. Of course I think mine is the most unbearable. You see if it had only been the next day—anything. But then if it had, I guess I could not have turned out for that kid. I guess I just think mine is so terrible. It can't be as bad as I think it is. It just can't be. I hope you find her."

The Judge's lip lifted. "I came here to escape someone;

not to find anyone." He looked at the other. His face was still broken with that grimace which might have been smiling. But his eyes were not smiling. "If I were looking for anybody, it would probably be my son."

"Oh. A son. I see."

"Yes: He would be about your age. He was ten when he died."

"Look for him here."

Now the Judge laughed outright, save for his eyes. The other watched him with that grave anxiety leavened now with quiet interested curiosity. "You mean you don't believe?" The Judge laughed aloud. Still laughing, he produced a cloth sack of tobacco and rolled a slender cigarette. When he looked up, the other was watching the entrance again. The Judge ceased to laugh.

"Have you a match?" he said. The other looked at him. The Judge raised the cigarette. "A match."

The other sought in his pockets. "No." He looked at the Judge. "Look for him here," he said.

"Thank you," the Judge answered. "I may avail myself of your advice later." He turned away. Then he paused and looked back. The young man was watching the entrance. The Judge watched him, bemused, his lip lifted. He turned on, then he stopped still. His face was now completely shocked, into complete immobility like a mask; the sensitive, worn mouth, the delicate nostrils, the eyes all pupil or pupilless. He could not seem to move, at all. Then Mothershed turned and saw him. For an instant Mothershed's pale eyes flickered, his truncated jaw, collapsing steadily with a savage, toothless motion, ceased.

"Well?" Mothershed said.

"Yes," the Judge said; "it's me." Now it was that, as the mesmerism left him, the shadow bewildered and wary and complete, touched his face. Even to himself his words

sounded idiotic. "I thought that you were dead. . . ." Then he made a supreme and gallant effort, his voice light, quizzical, contained again, "Well?"

Mothershed looked at him—a squat man in a soiled and mismatched suit stained with grease and dirt, his soiled collar innocent of tie—with a pale, lightly slumbering glare filled with savage outrage. "So they got you here, too, did they?"

"That depends on who you mean by 'they' and what you mean by 'here.'"

Mothershed made a savage, sweeping gesture with one arm. "Here, by God! The preachers. The Jesus shouters."

"Ah," the Judge said. "Well, if I am where I am beginning to think I am, I don't know whether I am here or not. But you are not here at all, are you?" Mothershed cursed violently. "Yes," the Judge said, "we never thought, sitting in my office on those afternoons, discussing Voltaire and Ingersoll, that we should ever be brought to this, did we? You, the atheist whom the mere sight of a church spire on the sky could enrage; and I who have never been able to divorce myself from reason enough to accept even your pleasant and labor-saving theory of nihilism."

"Labor-saving!" Mothershed cried. "By God, I. . . ." He cursed with impotent fury. The Judge might have been smiling save for his eyes. He sealed the cigarette again.

"Have you a match?"

"What?" Mothershed said. He glared at the Judge, his mouth open. He sought through his clothes. From out the savage movement, strapped beneath his armpit, there peeped fleetly the butt of a heavy pistol. "No," he said. "I ain't."

"Yes," the Judge said. He twisted the cigarette, his gaze light, quizzical. "But you still haven't told me what you are doing here. I heard that you had. . . ."

Again Mothershed cursed, prompt, outraged. "I ain't. I

just committed suicide." He glared at the Judge. "God damn it, I remember raising the pistol; I remember the little cold ring it made against my ear; I remember when I told my finger on the trigger. . . ." He glared at the Judge. "I thought that that would be one way I could escape the preachers, since by the church's own token. . . ." He glared at the Judge, his pale gaze apoplectic and outraged. "Well, I know why you are here. You come here looking for that boy."

The Judge looked down, his lip lifted, the movement pouched upward about his eyes. He said quietly, "No."

Mothershed watched him, glared at him. "Looking for that boy. Agnosticism." He snarled it. "Won't say 'Yes' and won't say 'No' until you see which way the cat will jump. Ready to sell out to the highest bidder. By God, I'd rather have give up and died in sanctity, with every heaven-yelping fool in ten miles around. . . ."

"No," the Judge said quietly behind the still, dead gleam of his teeth. Then his teeth vanished quietly, though he did not look up. He sealed the cigarette carefully again. "There seem to be a lot of people here." Mothershed now began to watch him with speculation, tasting his savage gums, his pale furious glare arrested. "You have seen other familiar faces besides my own here, I suppose. Even those of men whom you know only by name, perhaps?"

"Oh," Mothershed said. "I see. I get you now." The Judge seemed to be engrossed in the cigarette. "You want to take a whirl at them too, do you? Go ahead. I hope you will get a little more out of them that will stick to your guts than I did. Maybe you will, since you don't seem to want to know as much as you want something new to be uncertain about. Well, you can get plenty of that from any of them."

"You mean you have. . . ."

Again Mothershed cursed, harsh, savage. "Sure. Ingersoll. Paine. Every bastard one of them that I used to waste my

time reading when I had better been sitting on the sunny side of a log."

"Ah," the Judge said. "Ingersoll. Is he. . . ."

"Sure. On a bench just inside the park yonder. And maybe on the same bench you'll find the one that wrote the little women books. If he ain't there, he ought to be."

So the Judge sat forward, elbows on knees, the unlighted cigarette in his fingers. "So you too are reconciled," he said. The man who Mothershed said was Ingersoll looked at his profile quietly. "To this place."

"Ah," the other said. He made a brief, short gesture. "Reconciled."

The Judge did not look up. "You accept it? You acquiesce?" He seemed to be absorbed in the cigarette. "If I could just see Him, talk to Him." The cigarette turned slowly in his fingers. "Perhaps I was seeking Him. Perhaps I was seeking Him all the time I was reading your books, and Voltaire and Montesquieu. Perhaps I was." The cigarette turned slowly. "I have believed in you. In your sincerity. I said, if Truth is to be found by man, this man will be among those who find it. At one time—I was in the throes of that suffering from a still green hurt which causes even an intelligent man to cast about for anything, any straw—I had a foolish conceit: you will be the first to laugh at it as I myself did later. I thought, perhaps there is a hereafter, a way station into nothingness perhaps, where for an instant lesser men might speak face to face with men like you whom they could believe; could hear from such a man's own lips the words: 'There is hope,' or: 'There is nothing.' I said to myself, in such case it will not be Him whom I shall seek; it will be Ingersoll or Paine or Voltaire." He watched the cigarette. "Give me your word now. Say either of these to me. I will believe."

The other looked at the Judge for a time. Then he said, "Why? Believe why?"

The paper about the cigarette had come loose. The Judge twisted it carefully back, handling the cigarette carefully. "You see, I had a son. He was the last of my name and race. After my wife died we lived alone, two men in the house. It had been a good name, you see. I wanted him to be manly, worthy of it. He had a pony which he rode all the time. I have a photograph of them which I use as a bookmark. Often, looking at the picture or watching them unbeknownst as they passed the library window, I would think *What hopes ride yonder*; of the pony I would think *What burden do you blindly bear, dumb brute*. One day they telephoned me at my office. He had been found dragging from the stirrup. Whether the pony had kicked him or he had struck his head in falling, I never knew."

He laid the cigarette carefully on the bench beside him and opened the briefcase. He took out a book. "Voltaire's *Philosophical Dictionary*," he said. "I always carry a book with me. I am a great reader. It happens that my life is a solitary one, owing to the fact that I am the last of my family, and perhaps to the fact that I am a Republican officeholder in a Democratic stronghold. I am a Federal judge, from a Mississippi district. My wife's father was a Republican." He added quickly, "I believe the tenets of the Republican Party to be best for the country. You will not believe it, but for the last fifteen years my one intellectual companion has been a rabid atheist, almost an illiterate, who not only scorns all logic and science, but who has a distinct body odor as well. Sometimes I have thought, sitting with him in my office on a summer afternoon—a damp one—that if a restoration of faith could remove his prejudice against bathing, I should be justified in going to that length myself

even." He took a photograph from the book and extended it. "This was my son."

The other looked at the picture without moving, without offering to take it. From the brown and fading cardboard a boy of ten, erect upon the pony, looked back at them with a grave and tranquil hauteur. "He rode practically all the time. Even to church (I attended church regularly then. I still do, at times, even now). We had to take an extra groom along in the carriage to. . . ." He looked at the picture, musing. "After his mother died I never married again. My own mother was sickly, an invalid. I could cajole her. In the absence of my aunts I could browbeat her into letting me go barefoot in the garden, with two house servants on watch to signal the approach of my aunts. I would return to the house, my manhood triumphant, vindicated, until I entered the room where she waited for me. Then I would know that for every grain of dust which pleased my feet, she would pay with a second of her life. And we would sit in the dusk like two children, she holding my hand and crying quietly, until my aunts entered with the lamp. 'Now, Sophia. Crying again. What have you let him bulldoze you into doing this time?' She died when I was fourteen; I was twenty-eight before I asserted myself and took the wife of my choice; I was thirty-seven when my son was born." He looked at the photograph, his eyes pouched, netted by two delicate hammocks of myriad lines as fine as etching. "He rode all the time. Hence the picture of the two of them, since they were inseparable. I have used this picture as a bookmark in the printed volumes where his and my ancestry can be followed for ten generations in our American annals, so that as the pages progressed it would be as though with my own eyes I watched him ride in the flesh down the long road which his blood and bone had traveled before it became his." He held the picture. With his other hand he took up the ciga-

rette. The paper had come loose: he held it raised a little and then arrested so, as if he did not dare raise it farther. "And you can give me your word. I will believe."

"Go seek your son," the other said. "Go seek him."

Now the Judge did not move at all. Holding the picture and the dissolving cigarette, he sat in a complete immobility. He seemed to sit in a kind of terrible and unbreathing suspension. "And find him? And find him?" The other did not answer. Then the Judge turned and looked at him, and then the cigarette dropped quietly into dissolution as the tobacco rained down upon his neat, gleaming shoe. "Is that your word? I will believe, I tell you." The other sat, shapeless, grav sedentary, almost nondescript, looking down. "Come. You cannot stop with that. You cannot."

Along the path before them people passed constantly. A woman passed, carrying a child and a basket, a young woman in a plain, worn, brushed cape. She turned upon the man who Mothershed had said was Ingersoll a plain, bright, pleasant face and spoke to him in a pleasant, tranquil voice. Then she looked at the Judge, pleasantly, a full look without boldness or diffidence, and went on. "Come. You cannot. You cannot." Then his face went completely blank. In the midst of speaking his face emptied; he repeated "cannot. Cannot" in a tone of musing consternation. "Cannot," he said. "You mean, you *cannot* give me any word? That you do not know? That you, yourself, do not *know*? You, Robert Ingersoll? Robert *Ingersoll*?" The other did not move. "Is Robert Ingersoll telling me that for twenty years I have leaned upon a reed no stronger than myself?"

Still the other did not look up. "You saw that young woman who just passed, carrying a child. Follow her. Look into her face."

"A young woman. With a . . ." The Judge looked at the other. "Ah. I see. Yes. I will look at the child and I shall

see scars. Then I am to look into the woman's face. Is that it?" The other didn't answer. "That is your answer? your final word?" The other did not move. The Judge's lip lifted. The movement pouched upward about his eyes as though despair, grief, had flared up for a final instant like a dying flame, leaving upon his face its ultimate and fading gleam in a faint grimace of dead teeth. He rose and put the photograph back into the briefcase. "And this is the man who says that he was once Robert Ingersoll." Above his teeth his face mused in that expression which could have been smiling save for the eyes. "It is not proof that I sought. I, of all men, know that proof is but a fallacy invented by man to justify to himself and his fellows his own crass lust and folly. It was not proof that I sought." With the stick and the briefcase clasped beneath his arm he rolled another slender cigarette. "I don't know who you are, but I don't believe you are Robert Ingersoll. Perhaps I could not know it even if you were. Anyway, there is a certain integral consistency which, whether it be right or wrong, a man must cherish because it alone will ever permit him to die. So what I have been, I am; what I am, I shall be until that instant comes when I am not. And then I shall have never been. How does it go? *Non fui. Sum. Fui. Non sum.*"

With the unlighted cigarette in his fingers he thought at first that he would pass on. But instead he paused and looked down at the child. It sat in the path at the woman's feet, surrounded by tiny leaden effigies of men, some erect and some prone. The overturned and now empty basket lay at one side. Then the Judge saw that the effigies were Roman soldiers in various stages of dismemberment—some headless, some armless and legless—scattered about, lying profoundly on their faces or staring up with martial and battered inscrutability from the mild and inscrutable dust. On the exact center of each of the child's insteps was a small scar. There

was a third scar in the palm of its exposed hand, and as the Judge looked down with quiet and quizzical bemusement, the child swept flat the few remaining figures and he saw the fourth scar. The child began to cry.

"Shhhhhhhhh," the woman said. She glanced up at the Judge, then she knelt and set the soldiers up. The child cried steadily, with a streaked and dirty face, strong, unhurried, passionless, without tears. "Look!" the woman said, "See? Here! Here's Pilate too! Look!" The child ceased. Tearless, it sat in the dust, looking at the soldiers with an expression as inscrutable as theirs, suspended, aldermanic, and reserved. She swept the soldiers flat. "There!" she cried in a fond, bright voice, "see?" For a moment longer the child sat. Then it began to cry. She took it up and sat on the bench, rocking it back and forth, glancing up at the Judge. "Now, now," she said. "Now, now."

"Is he sick?" the Judge said.

"Oh, no. He's just tired of his toys, as children will get." She rocked the child with an air fond and unconcerned. "Now, now. The gentleman is watching you."

The child cried steadily. "Hasn't he other toys?" the Judge said.

"Oh, yes. So many that I don't dare walk about the house in the dark. But he likes his soldiers the best. An old gentleman who has lived here a long time, they say, and is quite wealthy, gave them to him. An old gentleman with a white mustache and that kind of popping eyes that old people have who eat too much; I tell him so. He has a footman to carry his umbrella and overcoat and steamer rug, and he sits here with us for more than an hour, sometimes, talking and breathing hard. He always has candy or something." She looked down at the child, her face brooding and serene. It cried steadily. Quizzical, bemused, the Judge stood, looking quietly down at the child's scarred, dirty feet. The woman

glanced up and followed his look. "You are looking at his scars and wondering how he got them, aren't you? The other children did it one day when they were playing. Of course they, didn't know they were going to hurt him. I imagine they were as surprised as he was. You know how children are when they get too quiet."

"Yes," the Judge said. "I had a son too."

"You have? Why don't you bring him here? I'm sure we would be glad to have him play with our soldiers too."

The Judge's teeth glinted quietly. "I'm not afraid he's a little too big for toys." He took the photograph from the briefcase. "This was my son."

The woman took the picture. The child cried steady and strong. "Why, it's Howard. Why, we see him every day. He rides past here every day. Sometimes he stops and lets us ride too. I walk beside to hold him on," she added, glancing up. She showed the picture to the child. "Look! See Howard on his pony? See?" Without ceasing to cry, the child contemplated the picture, its face streaked with tears and dirt, its expression detached, suspended, as though it were living two distinct and separate lives at one time. She returned the picture. "I suppose you are looking for him."

"Ah," the Judge said behind his momentary teeth. He replaced the picture carefully in the briefcase, the unlighted cigarette in his fingers.

The woman moved on the bench, gathering her skirts in with invitation. "Won't you sit down? You will be sure to see him pass here."

"Ah," the Judge said again. He looked at her, quizzical, with the blurred eyes of the old. "It's like this, you see. He always rides the same pony, you say?"

"Why, yes." She looked at him with grave and tranquil surprise.

"And how old would you say the pony is?"

"Why, I . . . It looks just the right size for him."

"A young pony, you would say then?"

"Why . . . yes. Yes." She watched him, her eyes wide.

"Ah," the Judge said again behind his faint still teeth. He closed the briefcase carefully. From his pocket he took a half dollar. "Perhaps he is tired of the soldiers too. Perhaps with this. . . ."

"Thank you," she said. She did not look again at the coin. "Your face is so sad. There: when you think you are smiling it is sadder than ever. Aren't you well?" She glanced down at his extended hand. She did not offer to take the coin. "He'd just lose it; you see. And it's so pretty and bright. When he is older, and can take care of small playthings. . . . He's so little now, you see."

"I see," the Judge said. He put the coin back into his pocket. "Well, I think I shall--"

"You wait here with us. He always passes here. You'll find him quicker that way."

"Ah," the Judge said. "On the pony, the same pony. You see, by that token, the pony would have to be thirty years old. That pony died at eighteen, six years unriden, in my lot. That was twelve years ago. So I had better get on."

And again it was quite unpleasant. It should have been doubly so, what with the narrow entrance and the fact that, while the other time he was moving with the crowd, this time he must fight his way inch by inch against it. "But at least I know where I am going," he thought, beneath his crushed hat, his stick and briefcase dragging at his arms; "which I did not seem to know before." But he was free at last, and looking up at the clock on the courthouse, as he never failed to do on descending his office stairs, he saw that he had a full hour before supper would be ready, before the neighbors would be ready to mark his clocklike passing.

"I shall have time to go to the cemetery," he thought, and

looking down at the raw and recent excavation, he swore with fretful annoyance, for some of the savage clods had fallen or been thrown upon the marble slab beside it. "Damn that Pettigrew," he said. "He should have seen to this. I told him I wanted the two of them as close as possible, but at least I thought that he. . . ." Kneeling, he tried to remove the earth which had fallen upon the slab. But it was beyond his strength to do more than clear away that which partially obscured the lettering: *Howard Allison II. April 3, 1903. August 22, 1913*, and the quietly cryptic Gothic lettering at the foot: *Auf Wiedersehen, Little Boy*. He continued to smooth, to stroke the letters after the earth was gone, his face bemused, quiet, as he spoke to the man who Mother-shed had said was Ingersoll, "You see, if I could believe that I shall see and touch him again, I shall not have lost him. And if I have not lost him, I shall never have had a son. Because I am I through bereavement and because of it. I do not know what I was nor what I shall be. But because of death, I know that I am. And that is all the immortality of which intellect is capable and flesh should desire. Anything else is for peasants, clods, who could never have loved a son well enough to have lost him." His face broke, myriad, quizzical, while his hand moved lightly upon the quiet lettering. "No. I do not require that. To lie beside him will be sufficient for me. There will be a wall of dust between us: that is true, and he is already dust these twenty years. But some day I shall be dust too. And—" he spoke now firmly, quietly, with a kind of triumph: "who is he who will affirm that there must be a web of flesh and bone to hold the shape of love?"

Now it was late. "Probably they are setting their clocks back at this very moment," he thought, pacing along the street toward his home. Already he should have been hearing the lawn mower, and then in the instant of exasperation at

Jake, he remarked the line of motor cars before his gate and a sudden haste came upon him. But not so much but what, looking at the vehicle at the head of the line, he cursed again. "Damn that Pettigrew! I told him, in the presence of witnesses when I signed my will, that I would not be hauled feet first through Jefferson at forty miles an hour. That if he couldn't find me a decent pair of horses. . . . I am a good mind to come back and haunt him, as Jake would have me do."

But the haste, the urgency, was upon him. He hurried round to the back door (he remarked that the lawn was freshly and neatly trimmed, as though done that day) and entered. Then he could smell the flowers faintly and hear the voice: he had just time to slip out of his overcoat and pajamas and leave them hanging neatly in the closet, and cross the hall into the odor of cut flowers and the drone of the voice, and slip into his clothes. They had been recently pressed, and his face had been shaved too. Nevertheless they were his own, and he fitted himself to the olden and familiar embrace which no iron could change, with the same lascivious eagerness with which he shaped his limbs to the bedclothes on a winter night.

"Ah," he said to the man who Mothershed had said was Ingersoll, "this is best, after all. An old man is never at home save in his own garments: his own old thinking and beliefs; old hands and feet, elbow, knee, shoulder which he knows will fit."

Now the light vanished with a mute, faint, decorous hollow sound which drove for a fading instant down upon him the dreadful, macabre smell of slain flowers; at the same time he became aware that the droning voice had ceased. "In my own house too," he thought, waiting for the smell of the flowers to fade; "yet I did not once think to notice who was speaking, nor when he ceased." Then he heard or felt the decorous scuffling of feet about him, and he lay in the close

dark, his hands folded upon his breast as he slept, as the old sleep, waiting for the moment. It came. He said quietly aloud, quizzical, humorous, peaceful, as he did each night in his bed in his lonely and peaceful room when a last full exhalation had emptied his body of waking and he seemed for less than an instant to look about him from the portal of sleep, "Gentlemen of the Jury, you may proceed."

Black Music

I

THIS is about Wilfred Midgleston, fortune's favorite, chosen of the gods. For fifty-six years, a clotting of the old gutful compulsions and circumscriptions of clocks and bells, he met walking the walking image of a small, snuffy, nondescript man whom neither man nor woman had ever turned to look at twice, in the monotonous shopwindows of monotonous hard streets. Then his apotheosis soared glaring, and to him at least not brief, across the unfathomed sky above his lost earth like that of Elijah of old.

I found him in Rincon, which is not large; less large even than one swaybacked tanker looming above the steel docks of the Universal Oil Company and longer than the palm-and abode-lined street paved with dust marked by splayed naked feet where the violent shade lies by day and the violent big stars by night.

"He came from the States," they told me. "Been here twenty-five years. He hasn't changed at all since the day he arrived, except that the clothes he came in have wore out and he hasn't learned more than ten words of Spanish." That was the only way you could tell that he was an old man, that he was getting along: he hadn't learned to speak hardly a word of the language of the people with whom he had lived twenty-five years and among whom it appeared that he intended to die and be buried. Appeared: he had no job: a

mild, hopelessly mild man who looked like a book-keeper in a George Ade fable dressed as a tramp for a Presbyterian social charade in 1890, and quite happy.

Quite happy and quite poor. "He's either poor, or he's putting up an awful front. But they can't touch him now. We told him that a long time ago, when he first come here. We said, 'Why don't you go on and spend, it, enjoy it? They've probably forgot all about it by now.' Because if I went to the trouble and risk of stealing and then the hardship of having to live the rest of my life in a hole like this, I'd sure enjoy what I went to the trouble to get."

"Enjoy what?" I said.

"The money. The money he stole and had to come down here. What else do you reckon he would come down here and stay twenty-five years for? just to look at the country?"

"He doesn't act and look very rich," I said.

"That's a fact. But a fellow like that. His face. I don't guess he'd have judgment enough to steal good. And not judgment enough to keep it, after he got it stole. I guess you are right. I guess all he got out of it was the running away and the blame. While somebody back there where he run from is spending the money and singing loud in the choir twice a week."

"Is that what happens?" I said.

"You're damned right it is. Some damn fellow that's too rich to afford to be caught stealing sets back and leaves a darn fool that never saw twenty-five hundred dollars before in his life at one time, pull his chestnuts for him. Twenty-five hundred seems a hell of a lot when somebody else owns it. But when you have got to pick up overnight and run a thousand miles, paying all your expenses, how long do you think twenty-five hundred will last?"

"How long did it last?" I said.

"Just about two years, by God. And then there I—" He

stopped. He glared at me, who had paid for the coffee and the bread which rested upon the table between us. He glared at me. "Who do you think you are, anyway? Wm. J. Burns?"

"I don't think so. I meant no offense. I just was curious to know how long his twenty-five hundred dollars lasted him."

"Who said he had twenty-five hundred dollars? I was just citing an example. He never had nothing, not even twenty-five hundred cents. Or if he did, he hid it and it's stayed hid ever since. He come here sponging on us white men, and when we got tired of it he took to sponging on these Spigs. And a white man has got pretty low when he's got so stingy with his stealings that he will live with Spiggotties before he'll dig up his own money and live like a white man."

"Maybe he never stole any money," I said.

"What's he doing down here, then?"

"I'm down here."

"I don't know you ain't run, either."

"That's so," I said. "You don't know."

"Sure I don't. Because that's your business. Every man has got his own private affairs, and no man respects them quicker than I do. But I know that a man, a white man, has got to have durn good reason. . . . Maybe he ain't got it now. But you can't tell me a white man would come down here to live and die without no reason."

"And you consider that stealing money is the only reason?"

He looked at me, with disgust and a little contempt. "Did you bring a nurse with you? Because you ought to have, until you learn enough about human nature to travel alone. Because human nature, I don't care who he is nor how loud he sings in church, will steal whenever he thinks he can get away with it. If you ain't learned that yet, you better go

back home and stay there where your folks can take care of you."

But I was watching Midgleston across the street. He was standing beside a clump of naked children playing in the shady dust: a small, snuffy man in a pair of dirty drill trousers which had not been made for him. "Whatever it is," I said, "it doesn't seem to worry him."

"Oh. Him. He ain't got sense enough to know he needs to worry about nothing."

Quite poor and quite happy. His turn to have coffee and bread with me came at last. No: that's wrong. I at last succeeded in evading his other down-at-heel compatriots like my first informant; men a little soiled and usually unshaven, who were unavoidable in the cantinas and coffee shops, loud, violent, maintaining the superiority of the white race and their own sense of injustice and of outrage among the grave white teeth, the dark, courteous, fatal, speculative alien faces, and had Midgleston to breakfast with me. I had to invite him and then insist. He was on hand at the appointed hour, in the same dirty trousers, but his shirt was now white and whole and ironed, and he had shaved. He accepted the meal without servility, without diffidence, without eagerness. Yet when he raised the handleless bowl I watched his hands tremble so that for a time he could not make junction with his lips. He saw me watching his hands and he looked at my face for the first time and I saw that his eyes were the eyes of an old man. He said, with just a trace of apology for his clumsiness: "I ain't et nothing to speak of in a day or so."

"Haven't eaten in two days?" I said.

"This hot climate. A fellow don't need so much. Feels better for not eating so much. That was the hardest trouble I had when I first come here. I was always a right hearty eater back home."

"Oh," I said. I had meat brought then, he protesting. But he ate the meat, ate all of it. "Just look at me," he said. "I ain't et this much breakfast in twenty-five years. But when a fellow gets along, old habits are hard to break. No, sir. Not since I left home have I et this much for breakfast."

"Do you plan to go back home?" I said.

"I guess not; no. This suits me here. I can live simple here. Not all cluttered up with things. My own boss (I used to be an architect's draughtsman) all day long. No. I don't guess I'll go back." He looked at me. His face was intent, watchful, like that of a child about to tell something, divulge itself. "You wouldn't guess where I sleep in a hundred years."

"No. I don't expect I could. Where do you sleep?"

"I sleep in that attic over that cantina yonder. The house belongs to the Company, and Mrs. Widrington, Mr. Widrington's wife, the manager's wife, she lets me sleep in the attic. It's high and quiet, except for a few rats. But when in Rome, you got to act like a Roman, I say. Only I wouldn't name this country Rome; I'd name it Ratville. But that ain't it." He watched me. "You'd never guess it in the world."

"No," I said. "I'd never guess it."

He watched me. "It's my bed."

"Your bed?"

"I told you you'd never guess it."

"No," I said. "I give up now."

"My bed is a roll of tarred roofing paper."

"A roll of what?"

"Tarred roofing paper." His face was bright, peaceful; his voice quiet, full of gleeful quiet. "At night I just unroll it and go to bed and the next a. m. I just roll it back up and lean it in the corner. And then my room is all cleaned up for the day. Ain't that fine? No sheets, no laundry, no noth-

ing. Just roll up my whole bed like an umbrella and carry it under my arm when I want to move."

"Oh," I said. "You have no family, then."

"Not with me. No."

"You have a family back home, then?"

He was quite quiet. He did not feign to be occupied with something on the table. Neither did his eyes go blank, though he mused peacefully for a moment. "Yes. I have a wife back home. Likely this climate wouldn't suit her. She wouldn't like it here. But she is all right. I always kept my insurance paid up; I carried a right smart more than you would figure a architect's draughtsman on a seventy-five-dollar salary would keep up. If I told you the amount, you would be surprised. She helped me to save; she is a good woman. So she's got that. She earned it. And besides, I don't need money."

"So you don't plan to go back home."

"No," he said. He watched me; again his expression was that of a child about to tell on itself. "You see, I done something."

"Oh. I see."

He talked quietly: "It ain't what you think. Not what them others—" he jerked his head, a brief embracing gesture—"think. I never stole any money. Like I always told Martha—she is my wife: Mrs. Midgleston—money is too easy to earn to risk the bother of trying to steal it. All you got to do is work. 'Have we ever suffered for it?' I said to her. 'Of course, we don't live like some. But some is born for one thing and some is born for another thing. And the fellow that is born a tadpole, when he tries to be a salmon all he is going to be is a sucker.' That's what I would tell her. And she done her part and we got along right well; if I told you how much life insurance I carried, you would be surprised. No; she ain't suffered any. Don't you think that."

"No," I said.

"But then I done something. Yes, sir."

"Did what? Can you tell?"

"Something. Something that ain't in the lot and plan for mortal human man to do."

"What was it you did?"

He looked at me. "I ain't afraid to tell. I ain't never been afraid to tell. It was just that these folks—" again he jerked his head slightly—"wouldn't have understood. Wouldn't have knowed what I was talking about. But you will. You'll know." He watched my face. "At one time in my life I was a farn."

"A farn?"

"Farn. Don't you remember in the old books where they would drink the red grape wine, how now and then them rich Roman and Greek senators would up and decide to tear up a old grape vineyard or a wood away off somewheres the gods used, and build a summer house to hold their frolics in where the police wouldn't hear them, and how the gods wouldn't hear them, and how the gods wouldn't like it about them married women running around nekkid, and so the woods god named—named—"

"Pan," I said.

"That's it. Pan. And he would send them little fellows that was half a goat to scare 'hem out—"

"Oh," I said. "A faun."

"That's it. A farn. That's what I was once. I was raised religious; I have never used tobacco or liquor; and I don't think now that I am going to hell. But the Bible says that them little men were myths. But I know they ain't, and so I have been something outside the lot and plan for mortal human man to be. Because for one day in my life I was a farn."

II

IN THE OFFICE where Midgleston was a draughtsman they would discuss the place and Mrs. Van Dyming's unique designs upon it while they were manufacturing the plans, the blue prints. The tract consisted of a meadow, a southern hillside where grapes grew, and a woodland. "Good land, they said. But wouldn't anybody live on it."

"Why not?" I said.

"Because things happened on it. They told how a long time ago a New England fellow settled on it and cleaned up the grape vines to market the grapes. Going to make jelly or something. He made a good crop, but when time came to gather them, he couldn't gather them."

"Why couldn't he gather them?"

"Because his leg was broke. He had some goats, and a old ram that he couldn't keep out of the grape lot. He tried every way he knew, but he couldn't keep the ram out. And when the man went in to gather the grapes to make jelly, the ram ran over him and knocked him down and broke his leg. So the next spring the New England fellow moved away.

"And they told about another man, a Italian lived the other side of the woods. He would gather the grapes and make wine out of them, and he built up a good wine trade. After a while his trade got so good that he had more trade than he did wine. So he began to doctor the wine up with water and alcohol, and he was getting rich. At first he used a horse and wagon to bring the grapes home on his private road through the woods, but he got rich and he bought a truck, and he doctored the wine a little more and he got richer and he bought a bigger truck. And one night a storm come up while he was away from home, gathering the grapes, and he didn't get home that night. The next a. m.

his wife found him. That big truck had skidded off the road and turned over and he was dead under it."

"I don't see how that reflected on the place," I said.

"All right. I'm just telling it. The neighbor tolks thought different, anyway. But maybe that was because they were not anything but country folks. Anyway, none of them would live on it, and so Mr. Van Dyming bought it cheap. For Mrs. Van Dyming. To play with. Even before we had the plans finished, she would take a special trainload of them down there to look at it, and not even a cabin on the place then, not nothing but the woods and that meadow grewed up in grass tall as a man, and that hillside where them grapes grew tangled. But she would stand there, with them other rich Park Avenue folks showing them how here would be the community house built to look like the Coliseum and the community garage yonder made to look like it was a Acropolis, and how the grape vine would be grubbed up entire and the hillside terraced to make a outdoors theatre where they could act in one another's plays; and how the meadow would be a lake with one of them Roman barges towed back and forth on it by a gas engine, with mattresses and things for them to lay down on while they et."

"What did Mr. Van Dyming say about all this?"

"I don't reckon he said anything. He was married to her, you know. He just says, one time, 'Now, Mattie—' and she turns on him, right there in the office, before us all, and says, 'Don't you call me Mattie.' ". He was quiet for a time. Then he said: "She wasn't born on Park Avenue. Nor Westchester neither. She was born in Poughkeepsie. Her name was Lumpkin.

"But you wouldn't know it, now. When her picture would be in the paper with all them Van Dyming diamonds, it wouldn't say how Mrs. Carleton Van Dyming used to be Miss Mathilda Lumpkin of Poughkeepsie. No, sir. Even a

newspaper wouldn't dared say that to her. And I reckon Mr. Van Dyming never either, unless he forgot like the day in the office. So she says, 'Don't you call me Mattie' and he hushed and he just stood there—a little man; he looked kind of like me, they said—tapping one of them little highprice cigars on his glove, with his face looking like he had thought about smiling a little and then he decided it wasn't even any use in that.

"They built the house first. It was right nice; Mr. Van Dyming planned it. I guess maybe he said more than just Mattie that time. And I guess that maybe Mrs. Van Dyming never said, 'Don't you call me Mattie' that time. Maybe he promised her he wouldn't interfere with the rest of it. Anyway, the house was right nice. It was on the hill, kind of in the edge of the woods. It was logs. But it wasn't too much logs. It belonged there, fitted. Logs where logs ought to be, and good city bricks and planks where logs ought not to be. It was there, Belonged there. It was all right. Not to make anybody mad. Can you see what I mean?"

"Yes. I think I can see what you mean."

"But the rest of it he never interfered with; her and her Acropolises and all." He looked at me quite intently. "Sometimes I thought. . . ."

"What? Thought what?"

"I told you him and me were the same size, looked kind of alike." He watched me. "Like we could have talked, for all of him and his Park Avenue clothes and his banks and his railroads, and me a seventy-five a week draughtsman living in Brooklyn, and not young neither. Like I could have said to him what was in my mind at any time, and he could have said to me what was in his mind at any time, and we would have understood one another. That's why sometimes I thought. . . ." He looked at me, intently, not groping exactly. "Sometimes men have more sense than women. They know

what to leave be, and women don't always know that. He don't need to be religious in the right sense or religious in the wrong sense. Nor religious at all." He looked at me, intently. After a while he said, in a decisive tone, a tone of decisive irrevocation: "This will seem silly to you."

"No. Of course not. Of course it won't."

He looked at me. Then he looked away. "No. It will just sound silly. Just take up your time."

"No. I swear it won't. I want to hear it. I am not a man who believes that people have learned everything." He watched me. "It has taken a million years to make what is, they tell us," I said. "And a man can be made and worn out and buried in threescore and ten. So how can a man be expected to know even enough to doubt?"

"That's right," he said. "That's sure right."

"What was it you sometimes thought?"

"Sometimes I thought that, if it hadn't been me, they would have used him. Used Mr. Van Dyming like they used me."

"They?" We looked at one another, quite sober, quite quiet.

"Yes. The ones that used that ram on that New England fellow, and that storm on that Italian."

"Oh. Would have used Mr. Van Dyming in your place, if you had not been there at the time. How did they use you?"

"That's what I am going to tell, How I was chosen and used. I did not know that I had been chosen. But I was chosen to do something beyond the lot and plan for mortal human man. It was the day that Mr. Carter (he was the boss, the architect) got the hurryup message from Mrs. Van Dyming. I think I told you the house was already built, and there was a big party of them down there where they could watch the workmen building the Coliseums and the Acropo-

lises. So the hurryup call came. She wanted the plans for the theatre, the one that was to be on the hillside where the grapes grew. She was going to build it first, so the company could set and watch them building the Acropolises and Coliseums. She had already begun to grub up the grape vines, and Mr. Carter put the theatre prints in a portfolio and give me the weekend off to take them down there, to her."

"Where was the place?"

"I don't know. It was in the mountains, the quiet mountains where never many lived. It was a kind of green air, chilly too, and a wind. When it blew through them pines it sounded kind of like a organ, only it didn't sound tame like a organ. Not tame; that's how it sounded. But I don't know where it was. Mr. Carter had the ticket all ready and he said it would be somebody to meet me when the train stopped.

"So I telephoned Martha and I went home to get ready. When I got home, she had my Sunday suit all pressed and my shoes shined. I didn't see any use in that, since I was just going to take the plans and come back. But Martha said how I had told her it was company there. 'And you are going to look as nice as any of them,' she says. 'For all they are rich and get into the papers. You're just as good as they are.' That was the last thing she said when I got on the train, in my Sunday suit, with the portfolio: 'You're just as good as they are, even if they do get into the papers.' And then it started."

"What started? The train?"

"No. It. The train had been running already a good while; we were out in the country now. I didn't know then that I had been chosen. I was just setting there in the train, with the portfolio on my knees where I could take care of it. Even when I went back to the ice water I didn't know that I had been chosen. I carried the portfolio with me and I was standing there, looking out the window and drinking out of

the little paper cup. There was a bank running along by the train then, with a white fence on it, and I could see animals inside the fence, but the train was going too fast to tell what kind of animals they were.

"So I had filled the cup again and I was drinking, looking out at the bank and the fence and the animals inside the fence, when all of a sudden it felt like I had been thrown off the earth. I could see the bank and the fence go whirling away. And then I saw it. And just as I saw it, it was like it had kind of exploded inside my head. Do you know what it was I saw?"

"What was it you saw?"

He watched me. "I saw a face. In the air, looking at me across that white fence on top of the bank. It was not a man's face, because it had horns, and it was not a goat's face because it had a beard and it was looking at me with eyes like a man and its mouth was open like it was saying something to me when it exploded inside my head."

"Yes. And then what? What did you do next?"

"You are saying 'He saw a goat inside that fence.' I know. But I didn't ask you to believe. Remember that. Because I am twenty-five years past bothering if folks believe me or not. That's enough for me. And I guess that's all anything amounts to."

"Yes," I said. "What did you do then?"

"Then I was laying down, with my face all wet and my mouth and throat feeling like it was on fire. The man was just taking the bottle away from my mouth (there were two men there, and the porter and the conductor) and I tried to sit up. 'That's whiskey in that bottle,' I said.

"'Why, sure not, doc,' the man said. 'You know I wouldn't be giving whiskey to a man like you. Anybody could tell by looking at you that you never took a drink in' your life. Did you?' I told him I hadn't. 'Sure you haven't,' he said. 'A

man could tell by the way it took that curve to throw you down that you belonged to the ladies' temperance. You sure took a bust on the head, though. How do you feel now? Here, take another little shot of this tonic.'

" 'I think that's whiskey,' I said.

"And was it whiskey?"

"I dont know. I have forgotten. Maybe I knew then. Maybe I knew what it was when I took another dose of it. But that didn't matter, because it had already started then."

"The whiskey had already started?"

"No. It. It was stronger than whiskey. Like it was drinking out of the bottle and not me. Because the men held the bottle up and looked at it and said, 'You sure drink it like it ain't whiskey, anyway. You'll sure know soon if it is or not, won't you?'

"When the train stopped where the ticket said, it was all green, the light was, and the mountains. The wagon was there, and the two men when they helped me down from the train and handed me the portfolio, and I stood there and I said, 'Let her rip.' That's what I said: 'Let her rip'; and the two men looking at me like you are looking at me."

"How looking at you?"

"Yes. But you dont have to believe. And I told them to wait while I got the whistle—"

"Whistle?"

"There was a store there, too. The store and the depot, and then the mountains and the green cold without any sun, and the dust kind of pale looking where the wagon was standing. Then we—"

"But the whistle," I said.

"I bought it in the store. It was a tin one, with holes in it. I couldn't seem to get the hang of it. So I threw the portfolio into the wagon and I said, 'Let her rip.' That was what I said. One of them took the portfolio out of the wagon

and gave it back to me and said, 'Say, doc, ain't this valuable?' and I took it and threw it back into the wagon and I said, 'Let her rip.'

"We all rode on the seat together, me in the middle. We sung. It was cold, and we went along the river, singing, and came to the mill and stopped. While one of them went inside the mill I began to take off my clothes—"

"Take off your clothes?"

"Yes. My Sunday suit. Taking them off and throwing them right down in the dust, by gummy."

"Wasn't it cold?"

"Yes. It was cold. Yes. When I took off my clothes I could feel the cold on me. Then the one came back from the mill with a jug and we drank out of the jug—"

"What was in the jug?"

"I dont know. I dont remember. It wasn't whiskey. I could tell by the way it looked. It was clear like water."

"Couldn't you tell by the smell?"

"I dont smell, you see. I dont know what they call it. But ever since I was a child, I couldn't smell some things. They say that's why I have stayed down here for twenty-five years."

"So we drank and I went to the bridge rail. And just as I jumped I could see myself in the water. And I knew that it had happened then. Because my body was a human man's body. But my face was the same face that had gone off inside my head back there on the train, the face that had horns and a beard."

"When I got back into the wagon we drank again out of the jug and we sung, only after a while I put on my underclothes and my pants like they wanted me to, and then we went on, singing."

"When we came in sight of the house I got out of the wagon: 'You dont want to get out here,' they said. 'We are

in the pasture where they keep that bull chained up.' But I got out of the wagon, with my Sunday coat and vest and the portfolio, and the tin flute."

III

HE CEASED. He looked at me, quite grave, quite quiet.

"Yes," I said. "Yes. Then what?"

He watched me. "I never asked you to believe nothing, did I? I will have to say that for you." His hand was inside his bosom. "Well, you had some pretty hard going, so far. But now I will take the strain off of you."

From his bosom he drew out a canvas wallet. It was roughly sewn by a clumsy hand and soiled with much usage. He opened it. But before he drew out the contents he looked at me again. "Do you ever make allowances?"

"Allowances?"

"For folks. For what folks think they see. Because nothing ever looks the same to two different people. Never looks the same to one person, depending on which side of it he looks at it from:"

"Oh," I said. "Allowances. Yes. Yes."

From the wallet he drew a folded sheet of newspaper. The page was yellow with age, the broken seams glued carefully with strips of soiled cloth. He opened it carefully, gingerly, and turned it and laid it on the table before me. "Dont try to pick it up," he said. "It's kind of old now, and it's the only copy I have. Read it."

I looked at it: the fading ink, the blurred page dated twenty-five years ago:

MANIAC AT LARGE IN VIRGINIA
MOUNTAINS

PROMINENT NEW YORK SOCIETY WOMAN
ATTACKED IN OWN GARDEN

Mrs. Carleton Van Dyming Of New York And
Newport Attacked By Half Nude Madman And
Maddened Bull In Garden Of Her Summer Lodge.
Maniac Escapes. Mrs. Van Dyming Prostrate

It went on from there, with pictures and diagrams, to tell how Mrs. Van Dyming, who was expecting a man from the office of her New York architect, was called from the dinner table to meet, as she supposed, the architect's man. The story continued in Mrs. Van Dyming's own words:

I went to the library, where I had directed that the architect's man be brought, but there was no one there. I was about to ring for the footman, when it occurred to me to go to the front door, since it is a local custom among these country people to come to the front and refuse to advance further or to retreat until the master or the mistress of the house appears. I went to the door. There was no one there.

I stepped out onto the porch. The light was on, but at first I could see no one. I started to re-enter the house but the footman had told me distinctly that the wagon had returned from the village, and I thought that the man had perhaps gone on to the edge of the lawn where he could see the theatre site, where the workmen had that day begun to prepare the ground by digging up the old grape vines. So I went in that direction. I had almost reached the end of the lawn when something caused me to turn. I saw, in relief between me and the lighted porch, a man bent over and hopping on one leg, who to my horror I realised to be in the act of removing his trousers.

I screamed for my husband. When I did so, the man freed his other leg and turned and came toward me running, clutching a knife (I could see the light from the porch gleaming on the long blade) in one hand, and a flat, square object in the other. I turned then and ran screaming toward the woods.

I had lost all sense of direction. I simply ran for my life. I found that I was inside the old vineyard, among the grape vines, running directly away from the house. I could hear the man running behind me and suddenly I heard him begin to make a strange noise. It sounded like a child trying to blow upon a penny whistle, then I realised that it was the sound of his breath whistling past the knifeblade clinched between his teeth.

Suddenly something overtook and passed me, making a tremendous uproar in the shrubbery. It rushed so near me that I could see its glaring eyes and the shape of a huge beast with horns, which I recognised a moment later as Carleton's—Mr. Van Dyming's—prize Durham bull; an animal so dangerous that Mr. Dyming is forced to keep it locked up. It was now free and it rushed past and on ahead, cutting off my advance, while the madman with the knife cut off my retreat. I was at bay; I stopped with my back to a tree, screaming for help.

“How did the bull get out?” I said.

He was watching my face while I read, like I might have been a teacher grading his school paper. “When I was a boy, I used to take subscriptions to the *Police Gazette*, for premiums. One of the premiums was a little machine guaranteed to open any lock. I don't use it anymore, but I still carry it in my pocket, like a charm or something, I guess. Anyway, I had it that night.” He looked down at the paper on the table. “I guess folks tell what they believe they saw. So you have to believe what they think they believe. But that paper don't tell how she kicked off her slippers (I nigh broke my neck over one of them) so she could run better, and how I could hear her going wump-wump-wump inside like a dray horse, and how when she would begin to slow up a little I would let out another toot on the whistle and off she would go again.

“I couldn't even keep up with her, carrying that portfolio

and trying to blow on that whistle too; seemed like I never would get the hang of it, somehow. But maybe that was because I had to start trying so quick, before I had time to kind of practice up, and running all the time too. So I threw the portfolio away and then I caught up with her where she was standing with her back against the tree, and that bull running round and round the tree, not bothering her, just running around the tree, making a right smart of fuss, and her leaning there whispering 'Carleton. Carleton' like she was afraid she would wake him up."

The account continued:

I stood against the tree, believing that each circle which the bull made, it would discover my presence. That was why I ceased to scream. Then the man came up where I could see him plainly for the first time. He stopped before me; for one both horrid and joyful moment I thought he was Mr. Van Dyming. "Carleton!" I said.

He didn't answer. He was stooped over again; then I saw that he was engaged with the knife in his hand. "Carleton!" I cried.

"Dang if I can get the hang of it, somehow," he kind of muttered, busy with the murderous knife.

"Carleton!" I cried. "Are you mad?"

He looked up then. I saw that it was not my husband, that I was at the mercy of a madman, a maniac, and a maddened bull. I saw the man raise the knife to his lips and blow again upon it that fearful shriek. Then I fainted.

IV

AND THAT WAS ALL. The account merely went on to say how the madman had vanished, leaving no trace, and that Mrs. Van Dyming was under the care of her physician, with a special train waiting to transport her and her household,

lock, stock, and barrel, back to New York; and that Mr. Van Dyming in a brief interview had informed the press that his plans about the improvement of the place had been definitely rescinded and that the place was now for sale.

I folded the paper as carefully as he would have. "Oh," I said. "And so that's all."

"Yes. I waked up about daylight the next morning, in the woods. I didn't know when I went to sleep nor where I was at first. I couldn't remember at first what I had done. But that aint strange. I guess a man couldn't lose a day out of his life and not know it. Do you think so?"

"Yes," I said. "That's what I think too."

"Because I know I aint as evil to God as I guess I look to a lot of folks. And I guess that demons and such and even the devil himself aint quite as evil to God as lots of folks that claim to know a right smart about His business would make you believe. Dont you think that's right?" The wallet lay on the table, open. But he did not at once return the newspaper to it.

Then he quit looking at me; at once his face became diffident, childlike again. He put his hand into the wallet; again he did not withdraw it at once.

• "That aint exactly all," he said, his hand inside the wallet, his eyes downcast, and his face: that mild, peaceful, nondescript face across which a mild moustache straggled. "I was a powerful reader, when I was a boy. Do you read much?"

"Yes. A good deal."

But he was not listening. "I would read about pirates and cowboys, and I would be the head pirate or cowboy—me, a durn little tyke that never saw the ocean except at Coney Island or a tree except in Washington Square day in and out. But I read them, believing like every boy, that some day . . . that living wouldn't play a trick on him like getting him alive and then. . . . When I went home that morning to get

ready to take the train, Martha says, 'You're just as good as any of them Van Dymings, for all they get into the papers. If all the folks that deserved it got into the papers, Park Avenue wouldn't hold them, or even Brooklyn,' she says." He drew his hand from the wallet. This time it was only a clipping, one column wide, which he handed me, yellow and faded too, and not long:

MYSTERIOUS DISAPPEARANCE

FOUL PLAY SUSPECTED

Wilfred Middleton, New York Architect, Disappears From Millionaire's Country House

POSSE SEEKS BODY OF ARCHITECT BELIEVED SLAIN BY
MADMAN IN VIRGINIA MOUNTAINS

May Be Coupled With Mysterious Attack
On Mrs. Van Dyming

Mountain Neighborhood In State Of Terror

....., Va. April 8, Wilfred Middleton, 56, architect, of New York City, mysteriously disappeared sometime on April 6th, while en route to the country house of Mr. Carleton Van Dyming near here. He had in his possession some valuable drawings which were found this morning near the Van Dyming estate, thus furnishing the first clue. Chief of Police Elmer Harris has taken charge of the case, and is now awaiting the arrival of a squad of New York detectives, when he promises a speedy solution if it is in the power of skilled criminologists to do so.

MOST BAFFLING IN ALL HIS EXPERIENCE

"When I solve this disappearance," Chief Harris is quoted, "I will also solve the attack on Mrs. Van Dyming on the same date."

Middleton leaves a wife, Mrs. Martha Middleton,
st., Brooklyn.

He was watching my face. "Only it's one mistake in it," he said.

"Yes," I said. "They got your name wrong."

"I was wondering if you'd see that. But that's not the mistake. . . ." He had in his hand a second clipping which he now extended. It was like the other two; yellow, faint. I looked at it, the fading, peaceful print through which, like a thin, rotting net, the old violence had somehow escaped, leaving less than the dead gesture fallen to quiet dust. "Read this one. Only that's not the mistake I was thinking about. But then, they couldn't have known at that time. . . ."

I was reading, not listening to him. This was a reprinted letter, an 'agony column' letter:

New Orleans, La.

April 10, . . .

To the Editor, New York Times

New York, N. Y.

Dear Sir

In your issue of April 8, this year you got the name of the party wrong. The name is Midgleston not Middleton. Would thank you to correct this error in local and metropolitan columns as the press a weapon of good & evil into every American home. And a power of that weight cannot afford mistakes even about people as good as any man or woman even if they dont get into the papers every day.

Thanking you again, beg to remain

A Friend

"Oh," I said. "I see. You corrected it."

"Yes. But that's not the mistake. I just did that for her.

You know how women are. Like as not she would rather not see it in the papers at all than to see it spelled wrong."

"She?"

"My wife. Martha. The mistake was, if she got them or not."

"I dont—Maybe you'd better tell me."

"That's what I am doing. I got two of the first one, the one about the disappearance, but I waited until the letter come out. Then I put them both into a piece of paper with *A Friend* on it, and put them into a envelope and mailed them to her. But I dont know if she got them or not. That was the mistake."

"The mistake?"

"Yes. She moved. She moved to Park Avenue when the insurance was paid. I saw that in a paper after I come down here. It told about how Mrs. Martha Midgleston of Park Avenue was married to a young fellow he used to be associated with the Maison Payot on Fifth Avenue. It didn't say when she moved, so I dont know if she got them or not."

"Oh," I said. He was putting the clippings carefully back into the canvas wallet.

"Yes, sir. Women are like that. It dont cost a man much to humor them now and then. Because they deserve it; they have a hard time. But it wasn't me. I didn't mind how they spelled it. What's a name to a man that's done and been something outside the lot and plan for mortal human man to do and be?"

The Leg

I

THE BOAT—it was a yawl boat with a patched, weathered sail—made two reaches below us while I sat with the sculls poised, watching her over my shoulder, and George clung to the pile, spouting Milton at Everbe Corinthia. When it made the final tack I looked back at George. But he was now but well into Comus' second speech, his crooked face raised, and the afternoon bright on his close ruddy head.

"Give way, George," I said. But he held us stationary at the pile, his glazed hat lifted, spouting his fine and cadenced folly as though the lock, the Thames, time and all, belonged to him, while Sabrina (or Hebe or Chloe or whatever name he happened to be calling Corinthia at the time) with her dairy-maid's complexion and her hair like mead poured in sunlight stood above us in one of her endless succession of neat print dresses, her hand on the lever and one eye on George and the other on the yawl, saying "Yes, milord" dutifully whenever George paused for breath.

The yawl luffed and stood away; the helmsman shouted for the lock.

"Let go, George," I said. But he clung to the pile in his fine and incongruous oblivion. Everbe Corinthia stood above us, her hand on the lever, bridling a little and beginning to reveal a certain concern, and looking from her to the yawl and back again I thought how much time she and I had

both spent thus since that day three years ago when, cow-eyed and bridling, she had opened the lock for us for the first time, with George holding us stationary while he apostrophised her in the metaphor of Keats and Spenser.

Again the yawl's crew shouted at us, the yawl aback and in stays. "Let go, you fool!" I said, digging the sculls. "Lock, Corinthia!"

George looked at me. Corinthia was now watching the yawl with both eyes. "What, Davy?" George said. "Must even 'thou help Circe's doves into the sea? Pull, then, O Super-Gadarene!"

And he shoved us off. I had not meant to pull away. And even if I had, I could still have counteracted the movement if Everbe Corinthia hadn't opened the lock. But open it she did, and looked once back to us and sat flat on the earth, crisp fresh dress and all. The skiff shot away under me; I had a fleeting picture of George still clinging with one arm around the pile, his knees drawn up to his chin and the hat in his lifted hand and of a long running shadow carrying the shadow of a boat-hook falling across the lock. Then I was too busy steering. I shot through the gates, carrying with me that picture of George, the glazed hat still gallantly aloft like the mastheaded pennant of a man-of-war, vanishing beneath the surface. Then I was floating quietly in slack water while the round eyes of two men stared quietly down at me from the yawl.

"Yer've lost yer mate, sir," one of them said in a civil voice. Then they had drawn me alongside with a boat-hook and standing up in the skiff, I saw George. He was standing in the towpath now, and Simon, Everbe Corinthia's father, and another man—he was the one with the boat-hook, whose shadow I had seen across the lock—were there too. But I saw only George with his ugly crooked face and his round head now dark in the sunlight. One of the watermen

was still talking. "Steady, sir. Lend 'im a 'and, Sam'l. There. 'E'll do now. Give 'im a turn, secing 'is mate. . . ."

"You fool, you damned fool!" I said. George stooped beside me, wringing his sopping flannels, while Simon and the second man—Simon with his iron-gray face and his iron-gray whisker that made him look like nothing so much as an aged bull peering surlily and stupidly across a winter hedgerow, and the second man, younger, with a ruddy capable face, in a hard, boardlike, town-made suit—watched us. Corinthia sat on the ground, weeping hopelessly and quietly. "You damned fool. Oh, you damned fool."

"Oxford young gentlemen," Simon said in a harsh, disgusted voice. "Oxford young gentlemen."

"Eh, well," George said, "I daresay I haven't damaged your lock over a farthing's worth." He rose, and saw Corinthia. "What, Circe!" he said, "tears over the accomplishment of your appointed destiny?" He went to her, trailing a thread of water across the packed earth, and took her arm. It moved willing enough, but she herself sat flat on the ground, looking up at him with streaming hopeless eyes. Her mouth was open a little and she sat in an attitude of patient despair, weeping tears of crystal purity. Simon watched them, the boat-hook—he had taken it from the second man, who was now busy at the lock mechanism, and I knew that he was the brother who worked in London, of whom Corinthia had once told us—clutched in his big knotty fist. The yawl was now in the lock, the two faces watching us across the parapet like two severed heads in a quiet row upon the footway. "Come, now," George said. "You'll soil your dress sitting there."

"Up, lass," Simon said, in that harsh voice of his which at the same time was without ill-nature, as though harshness were merely the medium through which he spoke. Corinthia

rose obediently, still weeping, and went on toward the neat little dove-cote of a house in which they lived. The sunlight was slanting level across it and upon George's ridiculous figure. He was watching me.

"Well, Davy," he said, "if I didn't know better, I'd say from your expression that you are envying me."

"Am I?" I said. "You fool. You ghastly lunatic."

Simon had gone to the lock. The two quiet heads rose slowly, as though they were being thrust gradually upward from out the earth, and Simon now stooped with the boat-hook over the lock. He rose, with the limp anonymity of George's once gallant hat on the end of the boat-hook, and extended it. George took it as gravely. "Thanks," he said. He dug into his pocket and gave Simon a coin. "For wear and tear on the boat-hook," he said. "And perhaps a bit of balm for your justifiable disappointment, eh, Simon?" Simon grunted and turned back to the lock. The brother was still watching us. "And I am obliged to you," George said. "Hope I'll never have to return the favor in kind." The brother said something, short and grave, in a slow pleasant voice. George looked at me again. "Well, Davy."

"Come on. Let's go."

"Right you are. Where's the skiff?" Then I was staring at him again, and for a moment he stared at me. Then he shouted, a long ringing laugh, while the two heads in the yawl watched us from beyond Simon's granite-like and contemptuous back. I could almost hear Simon thinking Oxford young gentlemen. "Davy, have you lost the skiff?"

"She's tied up below a bit, sir," the civil voice in the yawl said. "The gentleman walked out of 'er like she were a keb, without looking back."

The June afternoon slanted across my shoulder, full upon George's face. He would not take my jacket. "I'll pull

down and keep warm," he said. The once-glazed hat lay between his feet.

"Why don't you throw that thing out?" I said. He pulled steadily, looking at me. The sun was full in his eyes, striking the yellow flecks in them into fleeting, mica-like sparks. "That hat," I said. "What do you want with it?"

"Oh; that. Cast away the symbol of my soul?" He unshipped one scull and picked up the hat and turned and cocked it on the stem, where it hung with a kind of gallant and dissolute jauntiness. "The symbol of my soul rescued from the deep by—"

"Hauled out of a place it had no business being whatever, by a public servant who did not want his public charge cluttered up."

"At least you admit the symbology," he said. "And that the empire rescued it. So it is worth something to the empire. Too much for me to throw it away. That which you have saved from death or disaster will be forever dear to you, Davy; you cannot ignore it. Besides, it will not let you. What is it you Americans say?"

"We say, bunk. Why not use the river for a while? It's paid for."

He looked at me. "Ah. That is . . . Well, anyway, it's American, isn't it. That's something."

But he got out into the current again. A barge was coming up, in tow. We got outside her and watched her pass, empty of any sign of life, with a solemn implacability like a huge barren catafalque, the broad-rumped horses, followed by a boy in a patched coat and carrying a peeled goad, plodding stolidly along the path. We dropped slowly astern. Over her freeboard a motionless face with a dead pipe in its teeth contemplated us with eyes empty of any thought.

"If I could have chosen," George said, "I'd like to have been pulled out by that chap yonder. Can't you see him

picking up a boat-hook without haste and fishing you out without even shifting the pipe?"

"You should have chosen your place better, then. But it seems to me you're in no position to complain."

"But Simon showed annoyance. Not surprise nor concern: just annoyance. I don't like to be hauled back into life by an annoyed man with a boat-hook."

"You could have said so at the time. Simon didn't have to save you. He could have shut the gates until he got another head of water, and flushed you right out of his bailiwick without touching you, and saved himself trouble and ingratitude. Besides Corinthia's tears."

"Ay; tears. Corinthia will at least cherish a tenderness for me from now on."

"Yes; but if you'd only not got out at all. Or having not got in at all. Falling into that filthy lock just to complete a gesture. I think—"

"Do not think, my good David. When I had the choice of holding on to the skiff and being haled safely and meekly away, or of giving the lie to the stupid small gods at the small price of being temporarily submerged in this—" he let go one oar and dipped his hand in the water, then he flung it outward in dripping, burlesque magniloquence. "O Thames!" he said. "Thou mighty sewer of an empire!"

"Steer the boat," I said. "I lived in America long enough to have learned something of England's pride."

"And so you consider a bath in this filthy old sewer that has flushed this land since long before He who made it had any need to invent God . . . a rock about which man and all his bawling clamor seethes away to sluttishness. . . ."

We were twenty-one then; we talked like that, tramping about that peaceful land where in green petrification the old splendid bloody deeds, the spirits of the blundering courageous men, slumbered in every stone and tree. For that was

1914, and in the parks bands played Valse Septembre, and girls and young men drifted in punts on the moonlit river and sang Mister Moon and There's a Bit of Heaven, and George and I sat in a window in Christ Church while the curtains whispered in the twilight, and talked of courage and honor and Napier and love and Ben Jonson and death. The next year was 1915, and the bands played God Save the King, and the rest of the young men—and some not so young—sang Mademoiselle of Armentieres in the mud, and George was dead.

He had gone out in October, a subaltern in the regiment of which his people were hereditary colonels. Ten months later I saw him sitting with an orderly behind a ruined chimney on the edge of Givenchy. He had a telephone strapped to his ears and he was eating something which he waved at me as we ran past and ducked into the cellar which we sought.

II

I TOLD HIM to wait until they got done giving me the ether; there were so many of them moving back and forth that I was afraid someone would brush against him and find him there. "And then you'll have to go back," I said.

"I'll be careful," George said.

"Because you'll have to do something for me," I said. "You'll have to."

"All right. I will. What is it?"

"Wait until they go away, then I can tell you. You'll have to do it, because I can't. Promise you will."

"All right. I promise." So we waited until they got done and had moved down to my leg. Then George came nearer. "What is it?" he said.

"It's my leg," I said. "I want you to be sure it's dead. They may cut it off in a hurry and forget about it."

"All right. I'll see about it."

"I couldn't have that, you know. That wouldn't do at all. They might bury it and it couldn't lie quiet. And then it would be lost and we couldn't find it to do anything."

"All right. I'll watch." He looked at me. "Only I don't have to go back."

"You don't? You don't have to go back at all?"

"I'm out of it. You aren't out of it yet. You'll have to go back."

"I'm not?" I said. . . . "Then it will be harder to find it than ever. So you see about it. . . . And you don't have to go back. You're lucky, aren't you?"

"Yes. I'm lucky. I always was lucky. Give the lie to the stupid small gods at the mere price of being temporarily submerged in—"

"There were tears," I said. "She sat flat on the earth to weep them."

"Ay; tears," he said. "The flowing of all men's tears under the sky. Horror and scorn and hate and fear and indignation, and the world seething away to sluttishness while you look on."

"No; she sat flat in a green afternoon and wept for the symbol of your soul."

"Not for the symbol, but because the empire saved it, hoarded it. She wept for wisdom."

"But there were tears. . . . And you'll see to it? You'll not go away?"

"Ay," George said; "tears."

In the hospital it was better. It was a long room full of constant movement, and I didn't have to be afraid all the time that they would find him and send him away, though

now and then it did happen—a sister or an orderly coming into the middle of our talk, with ubiquitous hands and cheerful aseptic voices: "Now, now. He's not going. Yes, yes; he'll come back. Lie still, now."

So I would have to lie there, surrounding, enclosing that gaping sensation below my thigh where the nerve- and muscle-ends twitched and jerked, until he returned.

"Can't you find it?" I said. "I have you looked good?"

"Yes. I've looked everywhere. I went back out there and looked, and I looked here. It must be all right. They must have killed it."

"But they didn't. I told you they were going to forget it."

"How do you know they forgot it?"

"I know. I can feel it. It jeers at me. It's not dead."

"But if it just jeers at you."

"I know. But that won't do. Don't you see that won't do?"

"All right. I'll look again."

"You must. You must find it. I don't like this."

So he looked again. He came back and sat down and he looked at me. His eyes were bright and intent.

"It's nothing to feel bad about," I said. "You'll find it some day. It's all right; just a leg. It hasn't even another leg to walk with." Still he didn't say anything, just looking at me. "Where are you living now?"

"Up there," he said.

I looked at him for a while. "Oh," I said. "At Oxford?"

"Yes."

"Oh," I said. . . . "Why didn't you go home?"

"I don't know."

He still looked at me. "Is it nice there now? It must be. Are there still punts on the river? Do they still sing in the punts like they did that summer, the men and girls; I mean?" He looked at me, wide, intent, a little soberly.

"You left me last night," he said.

"Did I?"

"You jumped into the skiff and pulled away. So I came back here."

"Did I? Where was I going?"

"I don't know. You hurried away, up-river. You could have told me, if you wanted to be alone. You didn't need to run."

"I shan't again." We looked at one another. We spoke quietly now. "So you must find it now."

"Yes. Can you tell what it is doing?"

"I don't know. That's it."

"Does it feel like, it's doing something you don't want it to?"

"I don't know. So you find it. You find it quick. Find it and fix it so it can get dead."

But he couldn't find it. We talked about it quietly, between silences, watching one another. "Can't you tell anything about where it is?" he said. I was sitting up now, practicing accustoming myself to the wood-and-leather one. The gap was still there, but we had now established a sort of sullen armistice. "Maybe that's what it was waiting for," he said. "Maybe now . . ."

"Maybe so, I hope so. But they shouldn't have forgot to—Have I run away any more since that night?"

"I don't know."

"You don't know?" He was watching me with his bright, intent, fading eyes. "George," I said. "Wait, George!" But he was gone.

I didn't see him again for a long time. I was at the Observers' School—it doesn't require two legs to operate a machine gun and a wireless key and to orient maps from the gunner's piano stool of an R.E. or an F.E.—then, and I had almost finished the course. So my days were pretty well

filled, what with work and with that certitude of the young which so arbitrarily distinguishes between verities and illusions, establishing with such assurance that line between truth and delirium which sages knit their brows over. And my nights were filled too, with the nerve- and muscle-ends chafed now by an immediate cause: the wood-and-leather leg. But the gap was still there, and sometimes at night, isolated by invisibility, it would become filled with the immensity of darkness and silence despite me. Then, on the poised brink of sleep, I would believe that he had found it at last and seen that it was dead, and that some day he would return and tell me about it. Then I had the dream.

Suddenly I knew that I was about to come upon it. I could feel in the darkness the dark walls of the corridor and the invisible corner, and I knew that it was just around the corner. I could smell a rank, animal odor. It was an odor which I had never smelled before, but I knew it at once, blown suddenly down the corridor from the old fetid caves where experience began. I felt dread and disgust and determination, as when you sense suddenly a snake beside a garden path. And then I was awake, rigid, sweating; the darkness flowed with a long rushing sigh. I lay with the fading odor in my nostrils while my sweat cooled, staring up into the darkness, not daring to close my eyes. I lay on my back, curled about the gaping hole like a doughnut, while the odor faded. At last it was gone, and George was looking at me.

"What is it, Davy?" he said. "Can't you say what it is?"

"It's nothing." I could taste sweat on my lips. "It isn't anything. I won't again. I swear I shan't any more."

He was looking at me. "You said you had to come back to town. And then I saw you on the river. You saw me and hid, Davy. Pulled up under the bank, in the shadow. There was a girl with you." He watched me, his eyes bright and grave.

"Was there a moon?" I said.

"Yes. There was a moon."

"Oh God, oh God," I said. "I won't again, George! You must find it. You must!"

"Ah, Davy," he said. His face began to fade.

"I won't! I won't again!" I said. "George! George!"

A match flared; a face sprang out of the darkness above me. "Wake up," it said. I lay staring at it, sweating. The match burned down, the face fell back into darkness, from which the voice came bodiless: "All right now?"

"Yes, thanks. Dreaming. Sorry I waked you."

For the next few nights I didn't dare let go into sleep again. But I was young, my body was getting strong again and I was out of doors all day; one night sleep overtook me unawares, and I waked next morning to find that I had eluded it, whatever it was. I found a sort of peace. The days passed; I had learned the guns and the wireless and the maps, and most of all, to not observe what should not be observed. My thigh was almost reconciled to the new member, and, freed now of the outcast's doings, I could give all my time to seeking George. But I did not find him; somewhere in the mazy corridor where the mother of dreams dwells I had lost them both.

So I did not remark him at first even when he stood beside me in the corridor just beyond the corner of which It waited. The sulphur reek was all about me; I felt horror and dread and something unspeakable: delight. I believe I felt what women in labor feel. And then George was there, looking steadily down at me. He had always sat beside my head, so we could talk, but now he stood beyond the foot of the bed, looking down at me and I knew that this was farewell.

"Don't go, George!" I said. "I shan't again. I shan't any more, George!" But his steady, grave gaze faded slowly,

implacable, sorrowful, but without reproach. "Go, then!" I said. My teeth felt dry against my lip like sandpaper. "Go, then!"

And that was the last of it. He never came back, nor the dream. I knew it would not, as a sick man who wakes with his body spent and peaceful and weak knows that the illness will not return. I knew it was gone; I knew that when I realized that I thought of it only with pity. Poor devil, I would think. Poor devil.

But it took George with it. Sometimes, when dark and isolation had robbed me of myself, I would think that perhaps in killing it he had lost his own life: the dead dying in order to slay the dead. I sought him now and then in the corridors of sleep, but without success; I spent a week with his people in Devon, in a rambling house where his crooked ugly face and his round ruddy head and his belief that Marlowe was a better lyric poet than Shakespeare and Thomas Campion than either, and that breath was not a bauble given a man for his own pleasuring, eluded me behind every stick and stone. But I never saw him again.

III

THE PADRE had driven up from Poperinghe in the dark, in the side car of a motorcycle. He sat beyond the table, talking of Jotham Rust, Everbe Corinthia's brother and Simon's son, whom I had seen three times in my life. Yesterday I saw Jotham for the third and last time, arraigned before a court martial for desertion: the scarecrow of that once sturdy figure with his ruddy, capable face, who had pulled George out of the lock with a boat-hook that afternoon three years ago, charged now for his life, offering no extenuation nor explanation, expecting and asking no clemency.

"He does not want clemency," the padre said. The padre was a fine, honest man, incumbent of a modest living in the Midlands somewhere, who had brought the kind and honest stupidity of his convictions into the last place on earth where there was room for them. "He does not want to live." His face was musing and dejected, shocked and bewildered. "There comes a time in the life of every man when the world turns its dark side to him and every man's shadow is his mortal enemy. Then he must turn to God, or perish. Yet he . . . I cannot seem . . ." His eyes held that burly bewilderment of oxen; above his stock his shaven chin dejected, but not vanquished yet. "And you say you know of no reason why he should have attacked you?"

"I never saw the man but twice before," I said. "One time was night before last, the other was . . . two—three years ago, when I passed through his father's lock in a skiff while I was at Oxford. He was there when his sister let us through. And if you hadn't told me his sister's name, I wouldn't have remembered him then."

He brooded. "The father is dead, too."

"What? Dead? Old Simon dead?"

"Yes. He died shortly after the—the other. Rust says he left his father after the sister's funeral, talking with the sexton in Abingdon churchyard, and a week later he was notified in London that his father was dead. He says the sexton told him his father had been giving directions about his own funeral. The sexton said that every day Simon would come up to see him about it, made all the arrangements, and that the sexton joked him a little about it, because he was such a hale old chap, thinking that he was just off balance for the time with the freshness of his grief. And then, a week later, he was dead."

"Old Simon dead," I said. "Corinthia, then Simon, and

now Jotham." The candle flame stood steady and unwavering on the table.

"Was that her name?" he said. "Everbe Corinthia?" He sat in the lone chair, puzzlement, bewilderment in the very shape of his shadow on the wall behind him. The light fell on one side of his face, the major's crown on that shoulder glinting dully. I rose from the cot, the harness of the leg creaking with explosive loudness, and leaned over his shoulder and took a cigarette from my magneto case tobacco-box, and fumbled a match in my single hand. He glanced up.

"Permit me," he said. He took the box and struck a match. "You're fortunate to have escaped with just that." He indicated my sling.

"Yes, sir. If it hadn't been for my leg, I'd have got the knife in my ribs instead of my arm."

"Your leg?"

"I keep it propped on a chair beside the bed, so I can reach it easily. He stumbled over it and waked me. Otherwise he'd have stuck me like a pig."

"Oh," he said. He dropped the match and brooded again with his stubborn bewilderment. "And yet, his is not the face of an assassin in the dark. There is a forthrightness in it, a—a—what shall I say? a sense of social responsibility, integrity, that . . . And you say that you—I beg your pardon; I do not doubt your word; it is only that—Yet the girl is indubitably dead; it was he who discovered her and was with her until she died and saw her buried. He heard the man laugh once, in the dark."

"But you cannot slash a stranger's arm simply because you heard a laugh in the dark, sir. The poor devil is crazy with his own misfortunes."

"Perhaps so," the padre said. "He told me that he has other proof, something incontrovertible; what, he would not tell me."

"Then let him produce it. If I were in his place now . . ."

He brooded, his hands clasped on the table. "There is a justice in the natural course of events. . . . My dear sir, are you accusing Providence of a horrible and meaningless practical joke? No, no; to him who has sinned, that sin will come home to him. Otherwise . . . God is at least a gentleman. Forgive me: I am not—You understand how this comes home to me, in this unfortunate time when we already have so much to reproach ourselves with. We are responsible for this." He touched the small metal cross on his tunic, then he swept his arm in a circular gesture that shaped in the quiet room between us the still and sinister darkness in which the fine and resounding words men mouthed so glibly were the vampire's teeth with which the vampire fed. "The voice of God waking His servants from the sloth into which they have sunk. . . ."

"What, padre?" I said. "Is the damn thing making a dissenter of you too?"

He mused again, his face heavy in the candle light. "That the face of a willful shedder of blood, of an assassin in the dark? No, no; you cannot tell me that."

I didn't try. I didn't tell him either my belief that only necessity, the need for expedition and silence, had reduced Jotham to employing a knife, an instrument of any kind; that what he wanted was my throat under his hands.

He had gone home on his leave, to that neat little dove-cote beside the lock, and at once he found something strained in its atmosphere and out of tune. That was last summer, about the time I was completing my course at the Observers' School.

Simon appeared to be oblivious of the undercurrent, but Jotham had not been home long before he discovered that every evening about dusk Corinthia quitted the house for an hour or so, and something in her manner, or maybe in the

taut atmosphere of the house itself, caused him to question her. She was evasive, blazed suddenly out at him in anger which was completely unlike her at all, then became passive and docile. Then he realized that the passiveness was secretive, the docility dissimulation; one evening he surprised her slipping away. He drove her back to the house, where she took refuge in her room and locked the door, and from a window he thought he caught a glimpse of the man disappearing beyond a field. He pursued, but found no one. For an hour after dusk he lay in a nearby coppice, watching the house, then he returned. Corinthia's door was still locked and old Simon filled the house with his peaceful snoring.

Later something waked him. He sat up in bed, then sprang to the floor and went to the window. There was a moon and by its light he saw something white flitting along the towpath. He pursued and overtook Corinthia, who turned like a vicious small animal at the edge of the coppice where he had lain in hiding. Beyond the towpath a punt lay at the bank. It was empty. He grasped Corinthia's arm. She raged at him; it could not have been very pretty. Then she collapsed as suddenly and from the tangled darkness of the coppice behind them a man's laugh came, a jeering sound that echoed once across the moonlit river and ceased. Corinthia now crouched on the ground, watching him, her face like a mask in the moonlight. He rushed into the coppice and beat it thoroughly, finding nothing. When he emerged the punt was gone. He ran down to the water, looking this way and that. While he stood there the laugh came again, from the shadows beneath the other shore.

He returned to Corinthia. She sat as he had left her, her loosened hair about her face, looking out across the river. He spoke to her, but she did not reply. He lifted her to her feet. She came docilely and they returned to the cottage. He tried to talk to her again, but she moved stonily beside

him, her loosened hair about her cold face. He saw her to her room and locked the door himself and took the key back to bed with him. Simon had not awakened. The next morning she was gone, the door still locked.

He told Simon then and all that day they sought her, assisted by the neighbors. Neither of them wished to notify the police, but at dusk that day a constable appeared with his notebook, and they dragged the lock, without finding anything. The next morning, just after dawn, Jotham found her lying in the towpath before the door. She was unconscious, but showed no physical injury. They brought her into the house and applied their spartan, homely remedies, and after a time she revived, screaming. She screamed all that day until sunset. She lay on her back screaming, her eyes wide open and perfectly empty, until her voice left her and her screaming was only a ghost of screaming, making no sound. At sunset she died.

He had now been absent from his battalion for a hundred and twelve days. God knows how he did it; he must have lived like a beast, hidden, eating when he could, lurking in the shadow with every man's hand against him, as he sought through the entire B.E.F. for a man whose laugh he had heard one time, knowing that the one thing he could surely count on finding would be his own death, and to be foiled on the verge of success by an artificial leg propped on a chair in the dark.

How much later it was I don't know. The candle was lighted again, but the man who had awakened me was bending over the cot, between me and the light. But despite the light, it was a little too much like that night before last; I came out of sleep upstanding this time, with my automatic. "As you were," I said. "You'll not—" Then he moved back and I recognized the padre. He stood beside the table, the light falling on one side of his face and chest. I sat up and

put the pistol down. "What is it, padre? Do they want me again?"

"He wants nothing," the padre said. "Man cannot injure him further now." He stood there, a portly figure that should have been pacing benignantly in a shovel hat in green lanes between summer fields. Then he thrust his hand into his tunic and produced a flat object and laid it on the table. "I found this among Jotham Rust's effects which he gave me to destroy, an hour ago," he said. He looked at me, then he turned and went to the door, and turned again and looked at me.

"Is he—I thought it was to be at dawn."

"Yes," he said. "I must hurry back." He was either looking at me or not. The flame stood steady above the candle. Then he opened the door "May God have mercy on your soul," he said, and went out.

I sat in the covers and heard him blunder on in the darkness, then I heard the motorcycle splutter into life and die away. I swung my foot to the floor and rose, holding on to the chair on which the artificial leg rested. It was chilly; it was as though I could feel the toes even of the absent leg curling away from the floor, so I braced my hip on the chair and reached the flat object from the table and returned to bed and drew the blanket about my shoulders. My wrist watch said three o'clock.

It was a photograph, a cheap thing such as itinerant photographers turn out at fairs. It was dated at Abingdon in June of the summer just past. At that time I was lying in the hospital talking to George, and I sat quite still in the blankets, looking at the photograph, because it was my own face that looked back at me. It had a quality that was not mine: a quality vicious and outrageous and unappalled, and beneath it was written in a bold sprawling hand-like that of a child: "To Everbe Corinthia" followed by an unprintable

phrase, yet it was my own face, and I sat holding the picture quietly in my hand while the candle flame stood high and steady above the wick and on the wall my huddled shadow held the motionless photograph. In slow and gradual diminishment of cold tears the candle appeared to sink, as though burying itself in its own grief. But even before this came about, it began to pale and fade until only the tranquil husk of the small flame stood unwinded as a feather above the wax, leaving upon the wall the motionless husk of my shadow. Then I saw that the window was gray, and that was all. It would be dawn at Pop too, but it must have been some time, and the padre must have got back in time.

I told him to find it and kill it. The dawn was cold; on these mornings the butt of the leg felt as though it were made of ice. I told him to. I told him.

